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DIAMOND

Cricket today

Lifeline of Cricket

IS JOE ROOT THE BEST BATTER AMONG THE FAB 4?

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

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Joe Root's ability to perform in all conditions sets him apart. Although he hasn't yet scored a century in Australia, he averages nearly 40 on their challenging pitches. More importantly, he has scored centuries across various countries—showcasing his adaptability on fast, bouncy tracks as well as on slow, turning pitches. Whether it's the swinging conditions of England or the spinning tracks in the subcontinent, Root has proven his versatility by excelling everywhere without being troubled in any specific conditions. Since Alastair Cook's retirement in 2018, Joe Root has carried the burden of England's batting almost single-handedly. England has struggled to find reliable top-order batters, but Root has consistently been their mainstay, often rescuing the team from precarious situations. Unlike his peers, who usually had solid batting lineups around them, Root shouldered more responsibility on a less stable side. His ability to thrive despite these challenges makes his achievements even more remarkable. His ability to perform under pressure is arguably his greatest strength. If we were to measure greatness by adaptability, consistency, and impact, Joe Root's name would stand out as a serious contender for being the best batter among the Fab Four. Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are two of the most successful and iconic cricketers India has ever produced. Their contributions to Indian cricket are unparalleled, with both players boasting impressive records across all formats of the game. Domestic cricket is the backbone of Indian cricket, providing a platform for young and experienced players to showcase their skills. The Duleep Trophy, in particular, is one of the premier domestic tournaments, and the participation of senior players adds immense value to it. It increases the competition and gives younger players a chance to learn from the best in the business. By excluding Kohli and Sharma from such tournaments, the BCCI is inadvertently diluting the quality of domestic cricket. Respect for their contributions, preserving the integrity of domestic cricket, maintaining fairness, keeping players match-fit, and preventing potential rifts are all compelling reasons why the BCCI should usually treat Kohli and Sharma. These legends deserve to be on the field, playing the game they love and contributing to Indian cricket in every way possible. With the departure of seasoned campaigners like Kohli, Rohit, and Jadeja, Indian cricket is undergoing a significant transition. The team is in a rebuilding phase, where a new core needs to be established to carry the legacy forward. Suryakumar Yadav, with his wealth of experience and understanding of the game, is ideally positioned to lead this transition in the T20I format. By concentrating exclusively on T20Is, SKY can channel all his energy into molding a young and dynamic team. Enjoy the action-packed edition of Cricket Today.

England has struggled to find reliable top-order batters, but Root has consistently been their mainstay.

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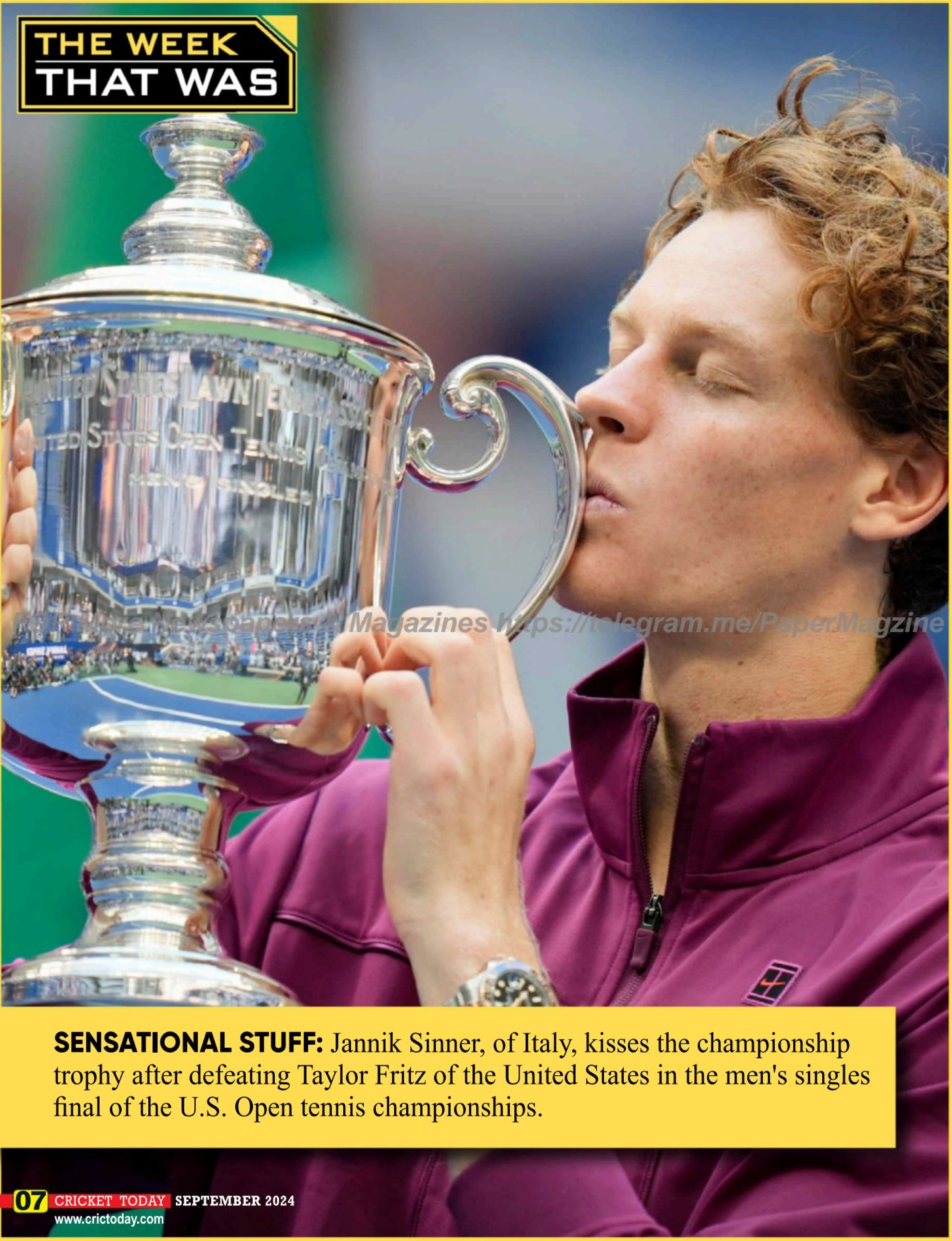
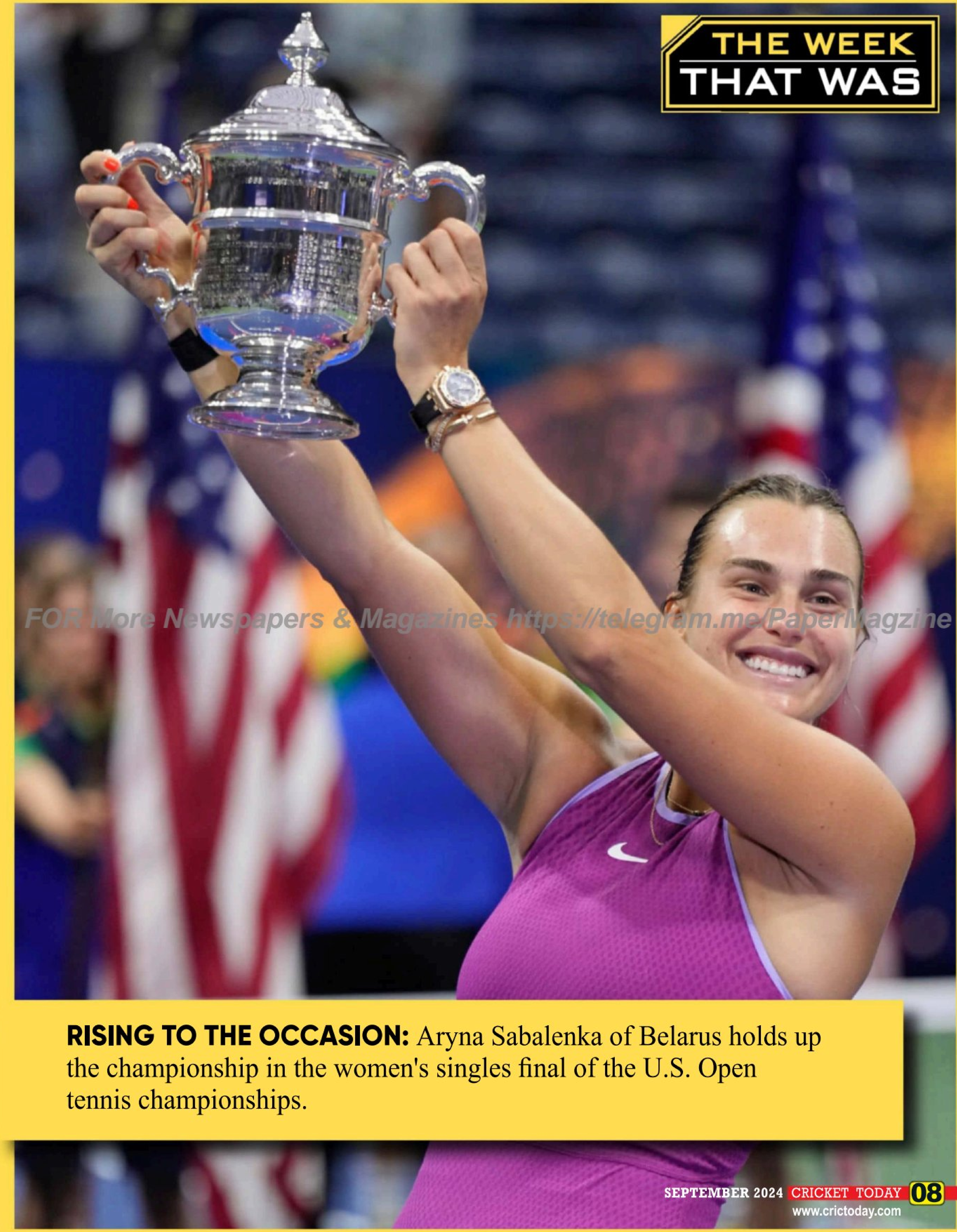
HISTORIC TRIUMPH: Bangladesh's players pose for a photograph after winning the Test cricket series against Pakistan in Rawalpindi.

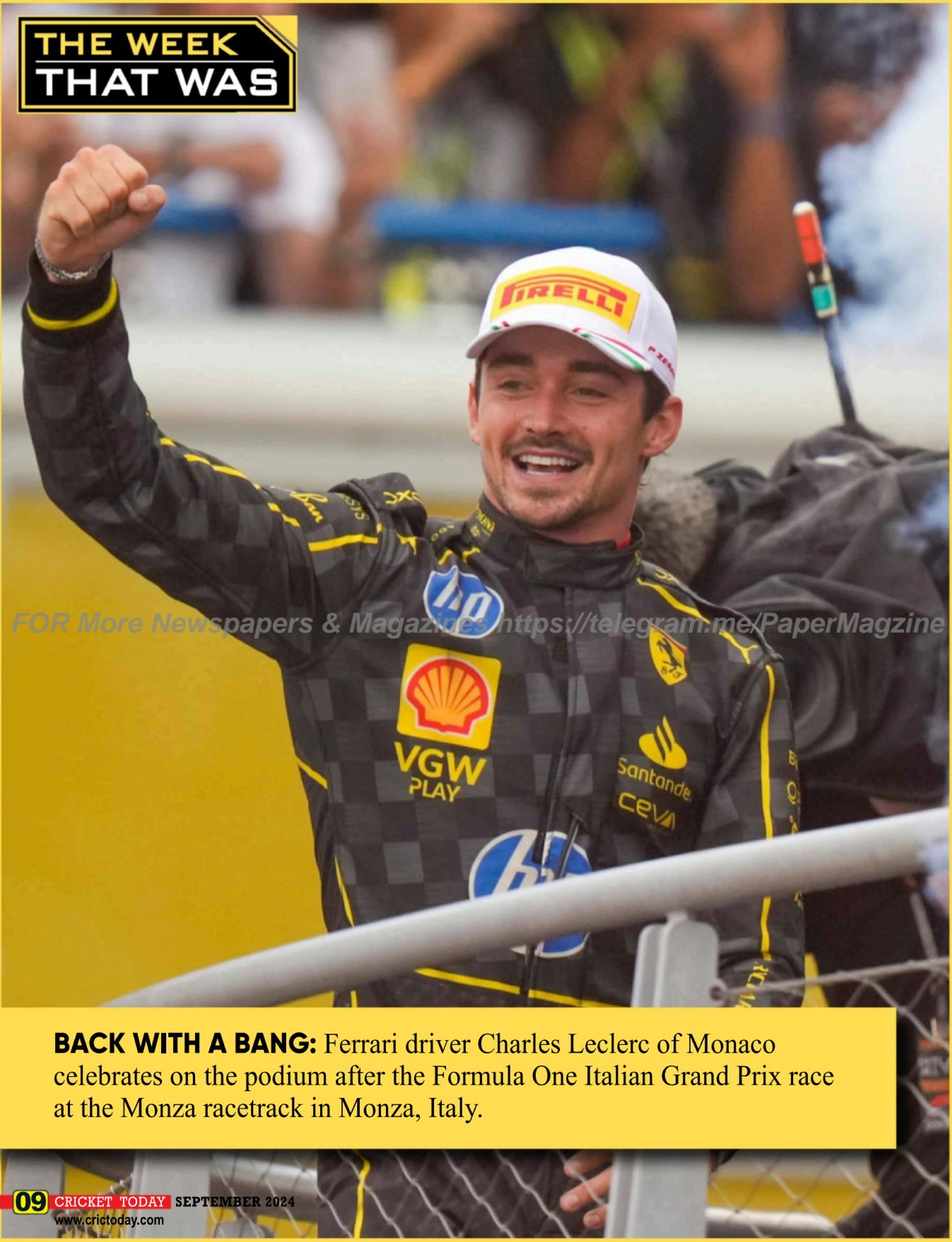
LED FROM THE FRONT: Bangladesh's captain Najmul Hossain Shanto holds a trophy after beating Pakistan 2-0 in the Test series.


UNITED STATES LAWN TENNIS ASSOCIATION
UNITED STATES OPEN TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS
MEN'S SINGLES

SENSATIONAL STUFF: Jannik Sinner, of Italy, kisses the championship trophy after defeating Taylor Fritz of the United States in the men's singles final of the U.S. Open tennis championships.



RISING TO THE OCCASION: Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus holds up the championship in the women's singles final of the U.S. Open tennis championships.



BACK WITH A BANG: Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc of Monaco celebrates on the podium after the Formula One Italian Grand Prix race at the Monza racetrack in Monza, Italy.

CHAMPIONSHIP

TOP PERFORMER: Haeran Ryu, of South Korea, kisses the trophy after winning the FM Championship LPGA golf tournament in a playoff.

Cricket Buzz

"Prithvi Shaw should blame himself for his absence from India's Test team"

- Aakash Chopra on batter's exclusion from national team

BABAR AZAM IS LIKE IMRAN KHAN

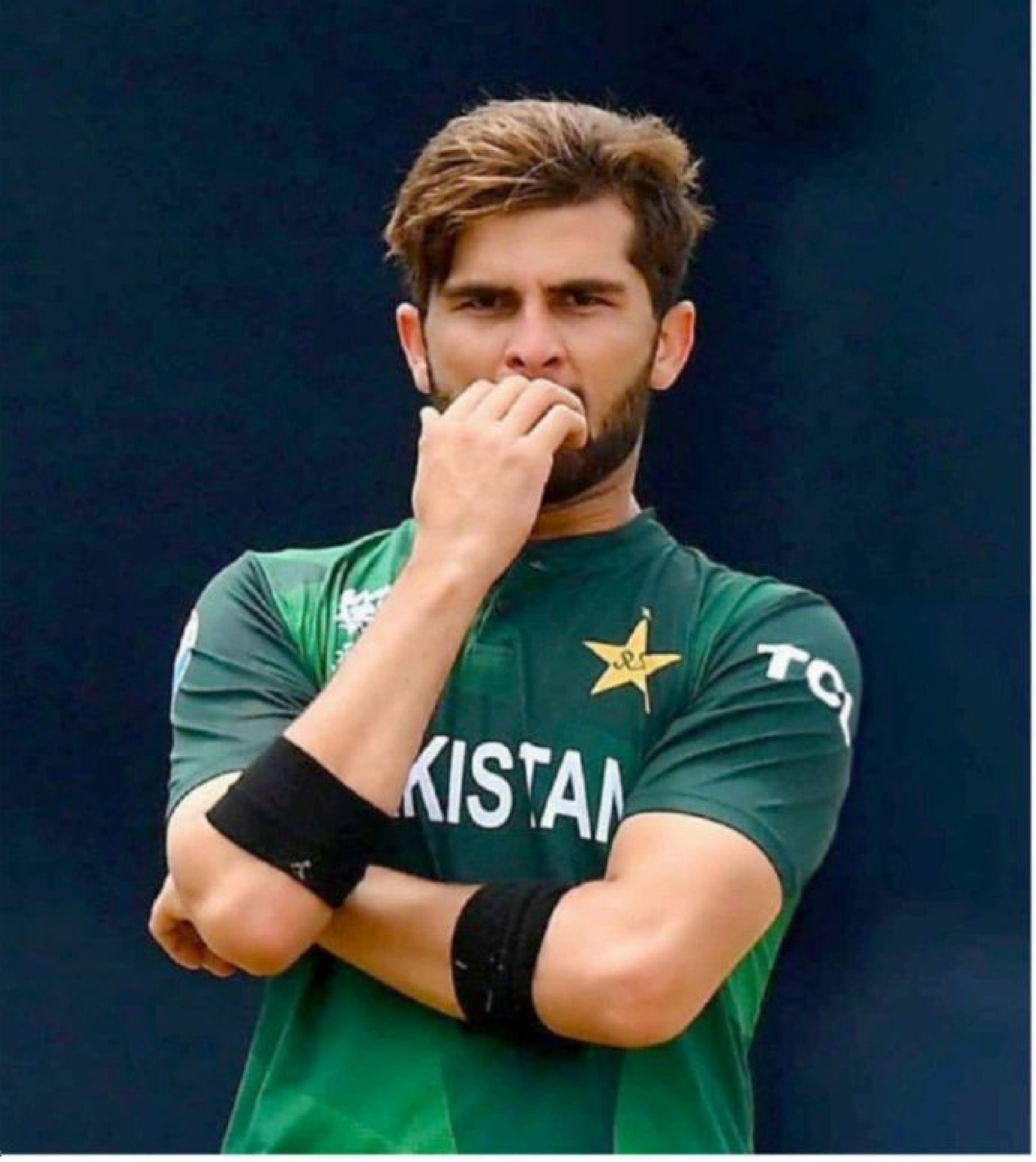
Basit Ali said that Babar Azam is very popular in Pakistan despite his poor cricket returns. He suggested that the 29-year-old has the biggest family following in the Asian country. According to Basit, the news channels discuss Babar every now and then, which shows his immense popularity. He also compared Babar's stardom to that of legendary Imran Khan. "Babar hasn't been among the runs, but cameras are still following him everywhere. The fans want to see him, and news channels keep debating about him. This is enough to prove that he is the most popular cricketer in the country," he said. In the recent two-Test series against Bangladesh, Babar scored 64 runs in four innings.

"We are capable of beating Pakistan again"

- USA's Ali Khan is confident of their success against Men in Green

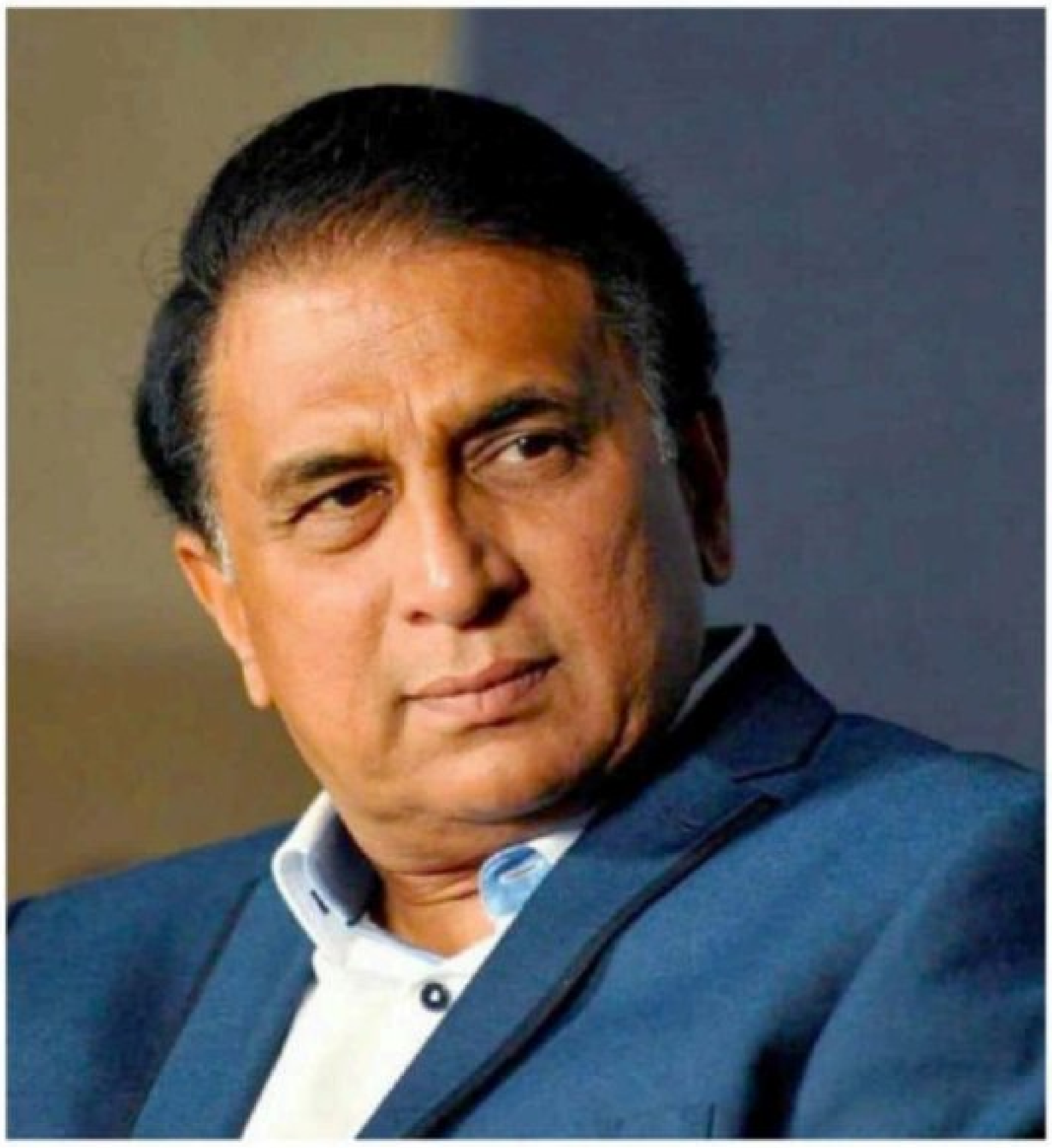
PAKISTAN SHOULD LEARN FROM INDIA

Former Pakistan spinner Danish Kaneria has once again lambasted the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for organizing the Champions One-Day Cup instead of focusing on Test cricket. The Men in Green were recently hammered by Bangladesh in the Test series. Kaneria feels that if Pakistan continue to prefer white-ball cricket over the Test format, the batters won't be able to play more than 50 overs in red-ball matches. Kaneria mentioned that Pakistan should learn from India. "Pakistan Cricket Board doesn't want to improve Test cricket. They should learn from India. Four teams are playing in the Duleep Trophy, with the leading cricketers taking part in the tournament. They are preparing for Test matches," he said.



BEST CANDIDATE TO LEAD PAKISTAN

Shaheen Afridi was given just one T20I series to prove himself as a captain. The defeat against New Zealand led to his sacking, with Babar Azam making a return as the skipper in white-ball cricket. Former wicket-keeper Moin Khan thinks it was not the right call to remove Shaheen from the leadership role. The 52-year-old mentioned that speedster is the best choice to become Pakistan's leader in the shortest format of the game. Moin highlighted that Shaheen's performances have gone down since his removal. "Shaheen can lead Pakistan, and his teammates like him. He is a good choice for captaincy in T20 format. There is no one better than him in white-ball cricket at the moment. He is the only deserving captaincy candidate."



SUNIL GAVASKAR SLAMS INDIA'S BASHER

Sachin Tendulkar's milestone of most runs in Test cricket is in danger. Joe Root is the front-runner to go past the legendary batter. Root is behind by 3500 runs, and he is 33. Joe Root's march towards Tendulkar's record has made English media and crickets excited. Michael Vaughan claimed that Root overtaking the Indian batter would make the Test format interesting because the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) would try its best to ensure that an Indian player again reclaims the top spot. Michael's statement hasn't impressed Sunil Gavaskar, who slammed England. "This business of India bashing has to be countered with aggression because they understand this language."

CAREER SWITCH

Former Australia cricketer Nathan Bracken, who was the No.1 ODI bowler in the world in 2008, is working as an account manager. Since his retirement, he moved away from the sport and decided to enter a new field. In 2011, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) bought him for INR 1.3 crore, but he didn't play for the franchise. In 2023, he entered politics and contested as a Liberal candidate for the Entrance electorate. His career was impacted by knee issues, forcing him to retire from all forms of the game. Although the left-arm seamer played five Tests for Australia, he was renowned for his bowling in white-ball cricket. He took 174 wickets in one-day internationals.

COVER STORY

IS JOE ROOT THE BEST BATTER AMONG THE FAB 4?

Joe Root's ability to perform in all conditions sets him apart. Although he hasn't yet scored a century in Australia, he averages nearly 40 on their challenging pitches. More importantly, he has scored centuries across various countries...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Cricket enthusiasts have long been mesmerized by the 'Fab 4'—Virat Kohli, Steve Smith, Kane Williamson, and Joe Root. These four modern-day greats have dominated Test cricket for over a decade, leaving an indelible mark on their batting prowess. While each of them has their own strengths, the debate on who stands tallest among them continues. In this comprehensive analysis, we take a deeper look at Joe Root's career and compare his achievements, performances, and statistics with those of his illustrious peers to determine if he truly stands above the rest.

A STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE FAB 4

To begin, here's a statistical snapshot of the Fab 4 in Test cricket:

- **Virat Kohli:** 8,848 runs in 113 Tests at an average of 49.15, with 29 centuries and 30 half-centuries.

- **Steve Smith:** 9,685 runs in 109 Tests at an average of 57.32, with 32 centuries and 41 half-centuries.

- **Kane Williamson:** 8,743 runs in 100 Tests at an average of 54.89, with 32 centuries and 34 half-centuries.

- **Joe Root:** 12,402 runs in 146 Tests at an average of 50.62, with 34 centuries and 64 half-centuries. Root leads in total runs, centuries, and half-centuries—a testament to his longevity and consistency at the highest level. But the numbers alone don't tell the full story.

The Case for Joe Root: More Than Just Numbers
While Joe Root's statistical dominance is clear, several key factors further cement his status as a top contender for the best among the Fab 4.

1. CONSISTENCY ACROSS ALL CONDITIONS

Joe Root's ability to perform in all conditions sets him apart. Although he hasn't yet scored a century in Australia, he averages nearly 40 on their challenging pitches. More importantly, he has scored centuries across various countries—showcasing his adaptability on fast, bouncy tracks as well as on slow, turning pitches. Whether it's the swinging conditions of England or the spinning tracks in the subcontinent, Root has proven his versatility by excelling everywhere without being troubled in any specific conditions.

2. POST-COOK ERA: CARRYING ENGLAND'S BATTING LINE-UP

Since Alastair Cook's retirement in 2018, Joe Root has carried the burden of England's batting almost single-handedly. England has struggled to find reliable top-order batters, but Root has consistently been their mainstay, often rescuing the team from precarious situations. Unlike his peers, who usually had solid batting lineups around them, Root shouldered more responsibility on a less stable side. His ability to thrive despite these challenges makes his achievements even more remarkable. His ability to perform under pressure is arguably his greatest strength. Over the years, he has often been the player England looks to when their batting collapses or when they need to build a strong foundation. He has mastered the art of pacing an innings, knowing when to attack and when to grind out runs. This temperament, coupled with his technical brilliance, allows him to excel in high-pressure situations, a trait that is especially valuable in Test cricket.

3. SECOND-INNINGS DOMINANCE

A key statistic in favor of Joe Root is his impressive second-innings average of 59, significantly higher than Virat Kohli, Kane Williamson, and Steve Smith. Root's ability to perform in the second innings, when conditions are typically tougher due to pitch deterioration, highlights his mental toughness and adaptability. Additionally, his fourth-innings average of 41 further strengthens his case, as he excels under pressure in difficult chases, where other players, including Smith, tend to struggle. This consistent ability to deliver in challenging situations reinforces Root's standing as one of the most complete Test batters among the Fab 4.

4. IMPACT ON SERIES: MOST PLAYER OF THE SERIES AWARDS

One of the most important measures of greatness is how a player impacts a series. Joe Root has won the most Player of the Series awards in Tests among the Fab 4, with a staggering nine awards to his name. This demonstrates his match-winning capabilities and the influence he has had on the series' outcome. His ability

to rise to the occasion and deliver in crucial moments solidifies his standing as one of the best, not just in the Fab 4 but in the history of the game.

5. RECORD-BREAKING 2021: A YEAR OF DOMINANCE

Root's 2021 stands as one of the greatest years in modern cricket. He scored a phenomenal 1,710 runs in 11 matches, breaking records for the most runs scored in a calendar year. He accumulated 7 centuries and 4 half-centuries during this period, leading England's batting against tough opposition. His run tally in 2021 was more than double that of any other player, and his ability to sustain such form over an entire year highlights his fitness, concentration, and technical proficiency.

6. THE MOST CENTURIES AND HALF-CENTURIES

Joe Root also has the most centuries (34) and half-centuries (64) among the Fab 4. While Steve Smith has a higher batting average, Root's ability to consistently convert starts into big scores has been a key feature of his career. The fact that Root has played significantly more matches than the others is also worth noting, as it shows not only his consistency but also his durability in a demanding sport. Joe Root's case for being the best among the Fab 4 is a compelling one. His longevity, adaptability across conditions, superior second-inning record, and match-winning contributions set him apart from the others. While Smith may have a higher batting average, and Williamson and Kohli have their own strengths, Root's all-around consistency, durability, and ability to perform when it matters most make him arguably the most valuable player among them. Ultimately, cricket fans are fortunate to witness the brilliance of all four players. Each has made a significant contribution to the game, and their legacy will endure for generations. However, if we were to measure greatness by adaptability, consistency, and impact, Joe Root's name stands out as a serious contender for being the best batter among the Fab 4. ■

OPINION

WHY RISHABH PANT MUST BAT AT NUMBER 5 IN TESTs

Rishabh Pant's track record at number 5 in Test cricket is nothing short of exceptional. In his 8 matches and 10 innings at this position, Pant has scored 721 runs, including 1 century and 6 fifties, with an impressive average of 80.11...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

As India prepares for their Test series against Bangladesh this September, one of the critical decisions revolves around Rishabh Pant's batting position. With the team under new leadership, the debate about where Pant should bat has intensified. Given his remarkable performances and the unique qualities he brings to the middle order, the number 5 position stands out as his ideal spot. Pant's journey as a middle-order batsman has been defined by his explosive batting and crucial innings, with his role at number 5 proving particularly successful. His historical impact, including his match-winning innings at the Gabba during the 2021 Border-Gavaskar Trophy, showcases his ability to thrive in high-pressure situations. As India looks to build a formidable team for the series, establishing Pant as a mainstay at number 5 could be the key to unlocking their full potential.

1. PROVEN TRACK RECORD

Rishabh Pant's track record at number 5 in Test cricket is nothing short of exceptional. In his 8 matches and 10 innings at this position, Pant has scored 721 runs, including 1 century and 6 fifties, with an impressive average of 80.11. These statistics highlight his remarkable consistency and ability to deliver under pressure. His performances at number 5 have been crucial in stabilizing the innings and accelerating the scoring rate when required. Pant's role in the middle order has proven vital for India, providing the team with the necessary balance and resilience. His ability to handle the pressures of this key position underscores his importance to the team's strategy and overall performance. Pant's numbers at number 5 not only reflect his talent but also his capacity to contribute significantly to India's success in Test matches.

2. BALANCING THE MIDDLE ORDER

Rishabh Pant's role at number 5 is crucial for maintaining balance in the middle order. This position acts as a bridge between the top order and the lower order, and Pant's aggressive yet stabilizing batting style is perfect for this role. When the top order has laid a foundation, Pant's presence ensures that the momentum is maintained, and he can accelerate the scoring rate or consolidate the innings as needed. His ability to adapt to various match situations—whether to consolidate a shaky start or capitalize on a strong foundation—makes him an invaluable asset. By batting at number 5, Pant provides the team with flexibility and depth, allowing the lower order to focus on finishing the innings effectively. This balance is essential for setting up or chasing competitive targets, making Pant's position at number 5 critical to India's success in Test cricket.

3. ADAPTING TO MATCH CONDITIONS

Pant's adaptability to different match conditions makes him a strong candidate for the number 5 position. Whether playing on a spinning track or a seam-friendly pitch, Pant's aggressive approach, combined with his solid technique, enables him to handle diverse conditions effectively. At number 5, he can assess the pitch and conditions after the top order's play and adjust his strategy accordingly. His ability to shift gears—whether to defend, build an innings, or accelerate the scoring—allows him to be versatile in various scenarios. This adaptability is crucial in Test cricket, where conditions can change rapidly and require a batter to adjust their game plan. Pant's skill in adapting to these conditions ensures that he can contribute significantly regardless of the match situation, reinforcing the value of his role at number 5.

4. UNLEASHING AGGRESSION WHEN NEEDED

Rishabh Pant's aggressive batting style is a game-changer, especially when he comes in at number 5. This position often requires a batter to play a dual role: stabilizing the innings when necessary and unleashing aggression to accelerate the scoring rate. Pant's natural

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flair for aggressive play makes him ideally suited for this role. His ability to shift from consolidation to aggressive play can disrupt the opposition's plans and put them under pressure. By batting at number 5, Pant can take advantage of any scoring opportunities and change the course of the match with his bold stroke play. His aggression is not only entertaining but also strategically beneficial, as it can quickly change the momentum of the game. Pant's knack for making quick runs and his fearless approach can be pivotal in crucial moments, enhancing the team's chances of setting or chasing challenging targets.

5. PSYCHOLOGICAL EDGE OVER OPPONENTS

Rishabh Pant's presence at number 5 provides a significant psychological advantage for the team. His aggressive and fearless batting approach can intimidate bowlers and unsettle fielding plans. This psychological edge is crucial in Test cricket, where mental toughness often influences match outcomes. Pant's ability to take on the bowlers and play unconventional shots can disrupt the opposition's strategy and create opportunities for India. His dynamic style of play forces bowlers to rethink their tactics and adds an element of unpredictability to the match. This mental pressure on the opposition can lead to mistakes and create scoring opportunities for India. Pant's role at number 5, therefore, not only strengthens the team's batting lineup but also gives them a psychological boost, which can be instrumental in high-stakes Test matches.

Rishabh Pant's role at number 5 is pivotal for India's Test strategy, offering a blend of stability, aggression, and adaptability. His proven track record, ability to balance the middle order, and flexibility to adjust to match conditions make him an ideal fit for this position. Pant's aggressive style and psychological impact on opponents further enhance his value. As India heads into the Test series in Bangladesh, solidifying Pant's role at number 5 will not only leverage his strengths but also strengthen the team's overall balance and performance. His presence in this position is crucial for navigating the challenges of international cricket. ■

7 PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR IN THE INDIA-BANGLADESH TEST SERIES

Yashasvi Jaiswal has quickly become one of the most talked-about young talents in world cricket. The 21-year-old opener has already made a significant impact in his short Test career, playing nine matches and amassing 1,028 runs. With an average of 68.5, including four centuries and two half-centuries...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

India is set to host Bangladesh for a two-match Test series starting September 19, 2024. This series is shaping up to be an intriguing contest, with both teams featuring a blend of seasoned veterans and emerging talents eager to make an impact. As the cricketing world watches closely, several players stand out as potential game-changers. Yashasvi Jaiswal, with his explosive batting, and Litton Das, fresh off a record-breaking performance, are sure to draw attention. Meanwhile, Rishabh Pant's return adds excitement, while the all-round brilliance of Ravindra Jadeja and the spin threat of Mehidy Hasan Miraz will be pivotal. These players are poised to play key roles in what promises to be a captivating series.

1. YASHASVI JAISWAL: THE RISING STAR

Yashasvi Jaiswal has quickly become one of the most talked-about young talents in world cricket. The 21-year-old opener has already made a significant impact in his short Test career, playing nine matches and amassing 1,028 runs. With an average of 68.5, including four centuries and two half-centuries, Jaiswal has shown that he is more than capable of handling the pressures of international cricket. Jaiswal's technique is sound, and his temperament is impressive for someone so young. His ability to build innings and accelerate when needed makes him a key player for India at the top of the order. The world has taken note of his potential, and this series against Bangladesh could be another stepping stone in his burgeoning career. With pitches in India expected to be batting-friendly, Jaiswal could have another prolific series and further solidify his place in the Indian Test side.

2. LITTON DAS: THE LATE BLOOMER

Litton Das has been a crucial part of Bangladesh's middle order for several years, but it is only recently that he has started to fulfil his potential. In the recent series against Pakistan, Litton was outstanding, scoring a century that helped Bangladesh secure a memorable victory. Often considered the "flower that never blossomed," Litton seems to be finding his groove at the international level. With 43 Test matches under his belt, Litton has scored 2,655 runs at an average of 34.93, including 17 half-centuries and four centuries. His ability to play both pace and spin with ease makes him a vital cog in Bangladesh's batting lineup. In the upcoming series against India, Litton will need to be at his best to counter India's potent bowling attack. If he can carry his form from the Pakistan series into this one, he could be the difference-maker for Bangladesh.

3. MEHIDY HASAN MIRAZ: THE SPIN MAESTRO

Mehidy Hasan Miraz has established himself as one of Bangladesh's premier spinners, and his performances in the 2022 series against India were a testament to his skill. In that series, Mehidy was a constant threat to the Indian batters, picking up crucial wickets and playing a vital role with the bat as well. His ability to contribute in both departments makes him a valuable asset for Bangladesh. In his 44 Test matches, Mehidy has taken 147 wickets at an average of 33.41. He has also shown his prowess with the bat, often providing crucial runs in the lower order. His recent performance against Pakistan, where he was named Player of the Series, further highlights his importance to the team. Mehidy's ability to exploit subcontinental conditions will be crucial in the upcoming series, and India will need to be wary of his threat.

4. HASAN MAHMUD: THE EMERGING PACE SENSATION

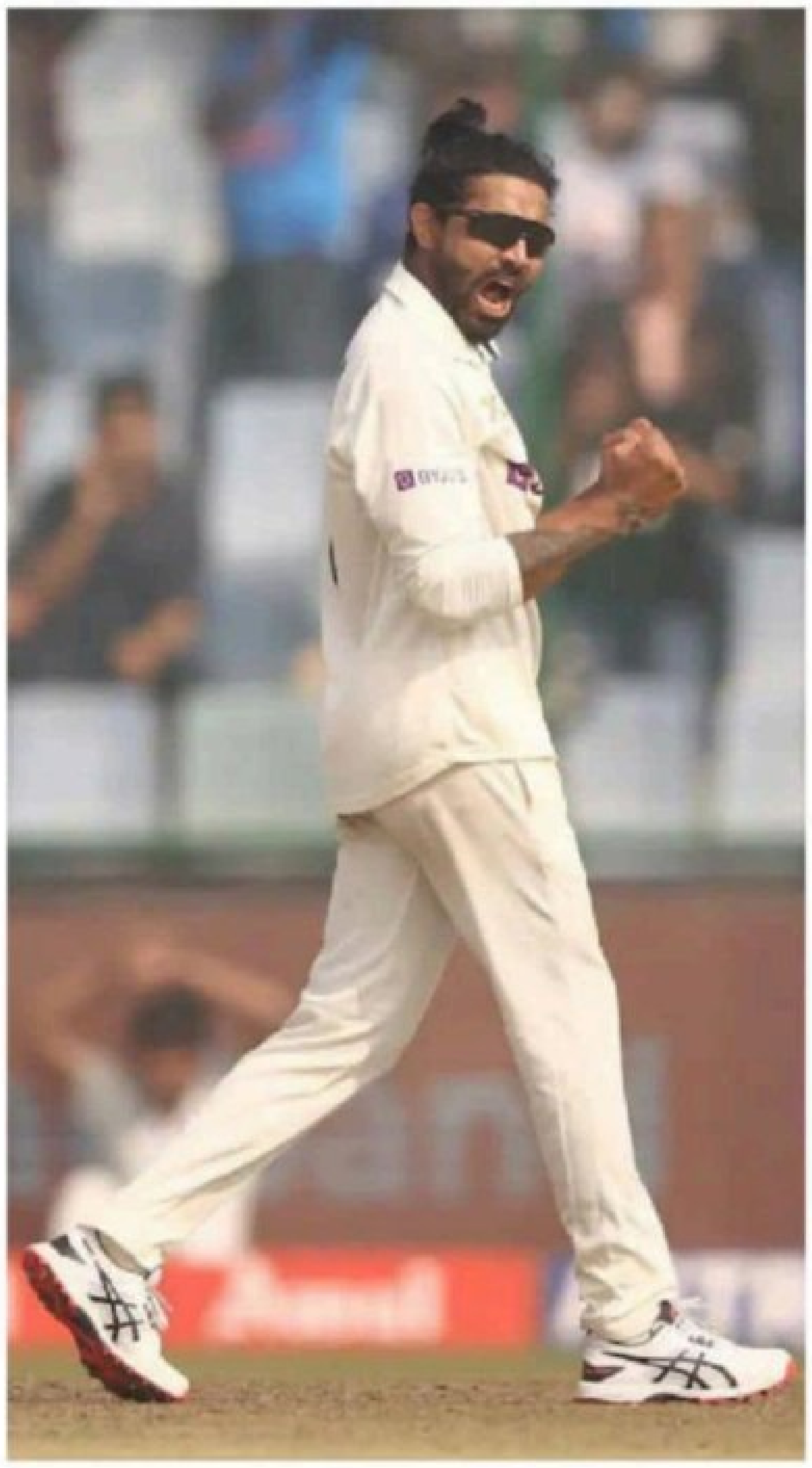
Hasan Mahmud is one of the newest faces in Bangladesh's Test squad, having made his debut earlier this year. However, he has already shown that he has what it takes to succeed at the highest level. In ODIs, Hasan has been exceptional, taking 30 wickets in 22 matches, including a recent five-wicket haul against Pakistan. Hasan's pace and ability to move the ball make him a dangerous bowler, especially in conditions that offer some assistance to the seamers. While he is still relatively inexperienced in Test cricket, his performances in the limited-overs formats suggest that he could be a key player for Bangladesh in the future. In the upcoming series against India, Hasan will have the opportunity to prove his worth in the longest format of the game.

5. RISHABH PANT: THE X-FACTOR

Rishabh Pant's return to Test cricket is one of the most anticipated events in Indian cricket. After a long layoff due to a severe accident in 2022, Pant is back in the squad and ready to make his mark once again. Known for his aggressive batting style and match-winning abilities, Pant has the potential to change the course of a game in a matter of minutes. Pant has played 33 Test matches, scoring 2,271 runs at an average of 43.7, including five centuries and 11 half-centuries. His fearless approach and ability to take on any bowling attack make him a crucial player for India, especially in the middle order. However, Pant is also under pressure to retain his spot, as Dhruv Jurel has been knocking on the door with impressive performances in the recent series against England. This competition for the wicketkeeper-batsman spot could bring out the best in Pant, making him a player to watch in the upcoming series.

6. SARFARAZ KHAN: THE DOMESTIC DYNAMO

Sarfaraz Khan has been a revelation in domestic cricket, earning him the nickname "The Don Bradman of First-Class Cricket" due to his staggering average. After years of consistent performances in the domestic circuit, Sarfaraz finally got his chance in the Indian Test team, and he has not disappointed. In his debut series against England, Sarfaraz made an immediate impact, scoring three half-centuries in five innings. The 26-year-old right-hander is tipped to be the next VVS Laxman, particularly for his ability to rescue the team in challenging situations. Batting at number six, Sarfaraz's role will be crucial in providing stability to the Indian middle order. With a strong temperament and a solid technique, Sarfaraz is poised to become a regular feature in the Indian Test team, and the series against Bangladesh could be another stepping stone in his career.



7. RAVINDRA JADEJA: THE ALL-ROUND VETERAN

Ravindra Jadeja has been a mainstay in the Indian cricket team for over a decade, known for his all-round abilities and match-winning performances. Recently, Jadeja announced his retirement from T20 Internationals to focus on the longer formats, and this series against Bangladesh will be an opportunity for him to reaffirm his value in the Test team. Jadeja has played 72 Test matches, scoring 3036 runs at an average of 36.18 and taking 294 wickets at an average of 24.1. In the last Test series before this one, Jadeja scored a century, highlighting his capabilities with the bat. With the Indian middle order in transition, Jadeja's experience will be crucial, especially if Kohli and Pant are not firing on all cylinders. His all-round ability, particularly in Indian conditions, makes him a vital player in the upcoming series against Bangladesh.

As India prepares to take on Bangladesh, these seven players will undoubtedly play crucial roles in determining the outcome of the series. Whether it's the emerging talents of Yashasvi Jaiswal and Sarfaraz Khan, the comeback story of Rishabh Pant, or the all-round capabilities of Ravindra Jadeja, the series promises to be an exciting showcase of skill and determination. For Bangladesh, players like Litton Das, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, and Hasan Mahmud will need to be at their best to challenge the Indian team on their home turf. This series is not just a battle between two teams but a stage for these players to showcase their talents and further cement their legacies in the world of cricket.

5 REASONS WHY BCCI SHOULD STOP GIVING SPECIAL TREATMENT TO VIRAT KOHLI AND ROHIT SHARMA

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are two of the most successful and iconic cricketers India has ever produced. Their contributions to Indian cricket are unparalleled, with both players boasting impressive records across all formats...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The triumph of India in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 final against South Africa has once again proven the strength and depth of Indian cricket. However, this victory also marked the end of an era, with Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma announcing their retirement from T20 Internationals (T20Is). The duo, who have been pillars of Indian cricket, were conspicuously absent from the Duleep Trophy season, a decision that has raised eyebrows among cricket enthusiasts. While the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) may have had reasons for keeping them away, possibly fearing injuries, it's essential to discuss why these legends deserve to be treated like any other senior Indian players. Here are five reasons BCCI should stop giving special treatment to two-star players.

1. RESPECT FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are two of the most successful and iconic cricketers India has ever produced. Their contributions to Indian cricket are unparalleled, with both players boasting impressive records across all formats of the game. Kohli, known for his aggressive style and consistency, has been a batting mainstay for over a decade. At the same time, Rohit's elegance and ability to score big hundreds have made him a fan favorite. These players have not only brought laurels to the nation but have also inspired a generation of cricketers. Their dedication, hard work, and passion for the game have set benchmarks for others to follow. By treating them differently, the BCCI risks undermining the legacy they have built. It is essential to honor their contributions by allowing them the same opportunities as other senior players, including participating in domestic tournaments like the Duleep Trophy.

2. PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF DOMESTIC CRICKET

Domestic cricket is the backbone of Indian cricket, providing a platform for young and experienced players to showcase their skills. The Duleep Trophy, in particular, is one of the premier domestic tournaments, and the participation of senior players adds immense value to it. It increases the competition and gives younger players a chance to learn from the best in the business. By excluding Kohli and Sharma from such tournaments, the BCCI is inadvertently diluting the quality of domestic cricket. Their presence would not only attract more fans but also provide a boost to the tournament's credibility. Moreover, it would convey that domestic cricket is crucial, regardless of a player's international stature. This would encourage other senior players to take domestic competitions seriously,

raising the overall standard of Indian cricket.

3. MAINTAINING FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY

Cricket is a team sport, and every player should be treated equally regardless of status or achievements. While it's understandable that the BCCI might want to protect Kohli and Sharma from potential injuries, it's unfair to single them out when other senior players actively participate in domestic cricket. This selective treatment creates an imbalance and could lead to resentment among other players. Fairness is a core principle in sports, and every player deserves equal opportunities to play and prove themselves. By keeping Kohli and Sharma away from domestic cricket, the BCCI denies them the chance to stay in touch with the game and maintain their form. Additionally, it sets a dangerous precedent where certain players are given preferential treatment, potentially disrupting the team's harmony.

4. KEEPING PLAYERS MATCH FIT AND MENTALLY SHARP

Cricket is as much a mental game as it is physical. Regular participation in matches, whether domestic or international, is crucial for maintaining match fitness and mental sharpness. Kohli and Sharma, despite their experience, are no exception to this rule. Being away from competitive cricket for extended periods can lead to a loss of form and confidence, harming their performances in other formats. Participating in domestic tournaments like the Duleep Trophy would allow them to stay match-fit and mentally sharp. It would also allow them to work on specific aspects of their game that might need fine-tuning. Furthermore, it would keep them connected to the domestic cricketing ecosystem, where they can mentor younger players and share their wealth of knowledge and experience.

5. PREVENTING A POTENTIAL RIFT BETWEEN THE PLAYERS AND THE BOARD

The relationship between players and the cricket

board is delicate and requires careful handling. Any perceived unfair treatment or lack of communication can lead to misunderstandings and potentially cause a rift between the players and the board. Kohli and Sharma have always been team players, putting the interests of Indian cricket above their own. However, if they feel they are being sidelined or treated differently, it could lead to dissatisfaction and strain their relationship with the BCCI. The BCCI needs to ensure that its actions are transparent and that there is open communication with the players. Treating Kohli and Sharma like any other senior players and allowing them to participate in domestic cricket would be a sign of respect and help maintain a healthy relationship between the players and the board. It would show that the BCCI values their contributions and trusts their judgment when managing their fitness and workload.

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma have given their all to Indian cricket and have played pivotal roles in many of the country's most significant victories. Their decision to retire from T20Is marks the end of an era, but it doesn't mean they should be treated any differently from other senior players. By keeping them away from domestic cricket, the BCCI is not only being unfair but is also missing out on the opportunity to enrich the domestic game.

Respect for their contributions, preserving the integrity of domestic cricket, maintaining fairness, keeping players match-fit, and preventing potential rifts are all compelling reasons why the BCCI should usually treat Kohli and Sharma. These legends deserve to be on the field, playing the game they love and contributing to Indian cricket in every way possible.

As Indian cricket moves forward, it's crucial to remember the values that have made the team successful – respect, fairness, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. Treating Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma usually, just like any other senior players, is a step in the right direction and a testament to the principles that Indian cricket stands for. ■

'BAZBALL' SPREADING IN ENGLISH CRICKET AS BRENDON MCCULLUM TAKES OVER WHITE-BALL TEAMS

England announced that Brendon McCullum, the coach of the test side since 2022, will also take charge of the one-day international and Twenty20 teams from the start of next year as part of a rejigged leadership structure...

BY STAFF WRITER

"Bazball" is coming to England's stagnating white-ball cricket teams. England announced that Brendon McCullum, the coach of the test side since 2022, will also take charge of the one-day international and Twenty20 teams from the start of next year as part of a rejigged leadership structure. The relentless international schedule has made it difficult for one person to take on both roles, with matches in the shorter and longer formats occasionally overlapping.

McCullum and the England and Wales Cricket Board, which has extended his contract until 2027, believe it is now possible because of changes to the calendar.

"The idea of a unified coaching structure, especially with the schedule easing next year, made perfect sense," McCullum said. "I'm energized by the prospect of guiding both teams and am grateful for the support from the ECB and my family as I take on these added responsibilities."

Matthew Mott resigned as England's white-ball coach on July 30 after presiding over the team's disappointing defenses of its ODI and T20 world titles.

The Australian was in charge for two years — and led England to the T20 World Cup title in 2022 — but was no longer getting the best out of a talented group captained by Jos Buttler, whose position also came under scrutiny. Rob Key, the managing director of England men's cricket, decided a "new direction" was needed so enter McCullum, the laid-back Kiwi whose "Bazball" approach — as it has been widely labeled — has led to an improvement in the fortunes of England's

test team under captain Ben Stokes. Essentially, it gives players license to be more attacking and emboldened with their shot-making and field placings, and be free from recrimination.

“The talent within English cricket is immense, and I’m looking forward to helping these players reach their full potential," McCullum said. "My goal is to create an environment where everyone can thrive and where we can continue to compete at the highest level across all formats.”

McCullum will start his dual roles in January, coinciding with England’s white-ball tour of India and the Champions Trophy. In the interim, Marcus Trescothick will serve as coach for the upcoming white-ball series against Australia and the tour of the Caribbean.

“I believe we are incredibly fortunate that a coach of his quality is prepared to commit wholeheartedly to English cricket,” Key said of McCullum. “Being able to align all teams now is particularly exciting and we look forward to taking on all challenges that come our way.

“For the last two years, constant clashes between formats have made it challenging for the white-ball environment; fortunately, these are easing starting from January. The timing of the schedule (from January) will allow him to dedicate the necessary focus to both roles, and we’re confident this restructure will bring out the best in our players and coaching staff.”

The English held both white-ball world titles after winning the 50-over crown in 2019 and the T20 crown three years later. They surrendered the 50-over title last year in dismal fashion after losing six of their nine group games in India. England was then thrashed in the semifinals of the T20 World Cup by eventual champion India in June.

SUPPORT FOR JOS BUTTLER

First, the short-term pain for England cricket captain Jos Buttler: He'll miss the Twenty20 series against Australia — and potentially the one-day series, too — because of a right calf injury. As for the long-term perspective, that should be much more healthy for arguably England's greatest-ever white-ball player after Buttler was given a glowing endorsement by the man who is about to become his coach.

Brendon McCullum confirmed on Thursday he would be sticking with Buttler as England's T20 and ODI captain once the New Zealander takes over

running the teams at the start of next year, having opted this week to combine that role with leading the test side. At times, Buttler appeared to be weighed down by the responsibility of captaining England during the ODI team's woeful defense of its 50-over World Cup trophy in India, and then during the T20 World Cup — where the English were again reigning champions — when they underwhelmed before getting thrashed by India in the semifinals. McCullum wants Buttler to reset, realize how good he is, and enjoy the final years of his career. He is adamant he wants that to be as captain, too.

"What I want from Jos," McCullum said in his first news conference since the announcement of his overarching dual role, "is for him to enjoy the next few years. If he was to retire today, he would go down as probably the greatest white-ball player England has ever produced.

"There's an opportunity over the next three, four years, however long he plays for, while he is captaining England, to enjoy it. Not protect anything. Get the most out of all those guys around him, keep walking towards danger, play with a smile on his face, and try to do something which is really cool, which he can look back on and say, 'Gee, I enjoyed those last few years.' That will be my job, to keep pushing him towards that."

England has already started blooding a new generation of leaders this summer, with Ben Stokes' torn hamstring allowing Ollie Pope to take charge of the ongoing test series against Sri Lanka.

McCullum wants that to happen on the coaching front, too, saying it will be important to have the right team around him so he can, from time to time, have a break amid a busy all-formats schedule over the coming years. That should help in enabling a successor to emerge, too.

"There'll be times where we'll have to be smart with (rotating) players and support staff in and out, and that will include myself," McCullum said. "I don't see that as a problem. I'm happy to be governed by the results and be the one who's in the gun if things don't work out.

"But there's some opportunities for some of the other coaches in our group at the moment to step up and run the team in a head coach capacity. I think that's great, because ultimately when I (leave) in 3 ½ years, you want the group of coaches who you've been able to bring along to be viable head coach candidates. Whilst it's a challenge, it's an opportunity." ■

MOEEN ALI RETIRES FROM INTERNATIONAL CRICKET

Ali is one of only five men to take 200 wickets and score 3,000 runs in tests for England, the others being Stokes, Ian Botham, Andrew Flintoff and Broad. He brought up both landmarks in successive tests in the 2023 Ashes series...

BY STAFF WRITER

England allrounder Moeen Ali has announced his retirement from international cricket, continuing the changing of the guard in the English game that has also seen fast-bowling greats Stuart Broad and Jimmy Anderson quit the sport over the past year. The 37-year-old Ali, who was overlooked for the upcoming white-ball series against Australia, said in an interview with British newspaper the Daily Mail that it was “time for the next generation.”

“It felt the time was right. I’ve done my part,” said Ali, who played 68 tests, 138 one-day internationals and 92 Twenty20 internationals for England — winning the World Cup in both of the shorter forms. Ali, who was a role model for British Muslims, said he still feels like he can compete at the highest level, but was “trying to be realistic” about his international future.

“I could hold on and try to play for England again, but I know in reality I won’t,” Ali told the Mail.

Matthew Mott was fired as head coach of England's limited-overs teams last month after disappointing title defenses in the ODI and T20 World Cups and the appetite for change continued with the removal from the squad of Ali and Jonny Bairstow — two senior players sharing over 400 caps.

Broad retired from cricket after last year's Ashes and Anderson followed suit in July during the test series against the West Indies. The likes of spinner Shoaib Bashir and 20-year-old fast-bowler Josh Hull have been brought into the fold to help usher in a new era for English cricket across all formats. Ali had been an influential vice-captain to Jos Buttler in the white-ball teams in recent years and was brought out of test retirement for the 2023 Ashes as a favor to captain Ben Stokes with England in need of a spinner. Throughout it all, Ali was an extremely popular member of the England dressing room — with his cover drive his most memorable shot.

“I was a free-spirit kind of player and played on instinct a lot of the time,” he told Sky Sports.

Ali is one of only five men to take 200 wickets and score 3,000 runs in tests for England, the others being Stokes, Ian Botham, Andrew Flintoff and Broad. He brought up both landmarks in successive tests in the 2023 Ashes series. Ali said he was “especially” proud of taking 204 test wickets as well as getting five test centuries and a hat trick against South Africa.

“He would do anything the team required, probably to the hindrance of his career — he batted from No. 1 to No. 8," former England captain Alastair Cook said. “He was one of the great teammates.”

Broad described Ali as “one of my favorite ever teammates”, adding on Sky Sports: “He was someone who could make the whole changing room feel relaxed.”

Ali said he wants to continue playing franchise cricket but ultimately hopes to move into coaching.

“Coaching is something I want to do — I want to be one of the best,” he said. “I can learn a lot from (England coach Brendon McCullum)." ■

CRICKET GREAT ANDREW FLINTOFF GETS NEW ROLE FOR ENGLAND

Flintoff has signed up for the winter tours of South Africa and Australia as well as summer fixtures against India A and Zimbabwe. Since returning to cricket over the past year, the 46-year-old Flintoff has been an assistant coach at this summer's T20 World Cup...

BY STAFF WRITER

Cricket great Andrew “Freddie” Flintoff was appointed head coach of the England Lions on Saturday. The former England captain has been a successful television personality since ending his storied playing career, but his appointment is his latest step into coaching.

“I’m incredibly excited to take on this role with the England Lions. It’s a fantastic opportunity to work with some of the best up-and-coming talent in the country and to help shape the future of the men’s game," Flintoff said.

Flintoff has signed up for the winter tours of South Africa and Australia as well as summer fixtures against India A and Zimbabwe. Since returning to cricket over the past year, the 46-year-old Flintoff has been an assistant coach at this summer’s T20 World Cup. He led the Northern Superchargers in The Hundred. He is currently standing in for batting coach Marcus Trescothick for England for this week's test against Sri Lanka.

Flintoff, who was an allrounder, played 79 tests for England and was the 2005 Ashes player of the series.

In December 2022, Flintoff sustained facial injuries from an accident that occurred during filming for “Top Gear" at the show’s test track in Surrey. The England and Wales Cricket Board said Flintoff was the “standout candidate from a pool of high-caliber applicants.”

“Andrew stood out thanks to his inspirational leadership, coaching expertise, and deep understanding of the game,” said Ed Barney, the ECB men's performance director.

Flintoff begins his role in October and will take charge for the upcoming year.

The Lions program helps to develop the next generation of cricket talent.

“With Andrew’s guidance, the highest potential players will continue to develop, thrive and take their game to new levels," Barney said. "I'm confident his influence will resonate across English cricket, helping drive the game forward.”

Since retiring from the sport — initially in 2010 and then in 2014 — Flintoff has featured in popular TV shows like “Top Gear” and “A League of Their Own.”

He also had a short-lived attempt at boxing. ■

PAKISTAN TEST CRICKETERS CRITICIZED AT HOME AFTER DEBACLE AGAINST BANGLADESH

Masood blamed lack of fitness and long gaps between test matches among the reasons for the debacle against Bangladesh as he suffered a second successive whitewash after losing 3-0 to Australia earlier this year...

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BY STAFF WRITER

Pakistan's embarrassing test series whitewash against Bangladesh has been heavily criticized at home, with former captain Ramiz Raja calling for an explanation from red-ball captain Shan Masood and senior players.

"Pakistan cricket sunk in Bay of Bengal," read a headline in leading Urdu language newspaper Daily Jang on Wednesday.

Bangladesh jumped three places to No. 4 in the ICC World Test Championship with back-to-back victories against Pakistan, which is lying at No. 8 just above last-placed West Indies.

Masood blamed lack of fitness and long gaps between test matches among the reasons for the debacle against Bangladesh as he suffered a second successive whitewash after losing 3-0 to Australia earlier this year.

"It's the job of the leader to fight," Raja said on his Youtube channel Ramiz Speaks. "Agreed he (Masood) is a young captain, agreed the bowling attack was young, but he had picked up this bowling attack."

Bangladesh quashed all of Pakistan's plans during its historic achievement in test cricket as Pakistan faced a 10-wicket defeat in the first test after it opted to go with four fast bowlers – including new-ball pair of Shaheen Shah Afridi and Naseem Shah. Pakistan's ploy to rest both Afridi and Naseem for the second test and try their three premier domestic pace bowlers — Mir Hamza, Khurram Shahzad and Mohammad Ali — also couldn't turn the result as Bangladesh romped to a six-wicket win on Tuesday to seal the epic series win. Khurram and Hamza had floored Bangladesh to 26-6 in the first innings but Litton Das' 138 and Mehidy Hasan Miraz's 78 led an improbable fightback.

"It's a first class bowling attack not a test cricket bowling attack," Raja said.

There are question marks on Masood's own batting form as the left-hander scored only one half century against Bangladesh while his last test century came against England in 2020.

"He has to answer about his own performance," Raja said. "He is not scoring and the way Bangladesh squeezed, somebody has to be called for explanation, senior players needs to explain."

There has been a sharp decline in Pakistan's performances this year — both in red-ball and white-ball cricket. The introduction of foreign coaches has made no impact with Pakistan losing to co-host United States and India at the T20 World Cup to make an early exit under head coach Gary Kirsten of South Africa.

Jason Gillespie took over as head coach of red-ball cricket, but the former Australian fast bowler failed in his first assignment against Bangladesh.

"I fail to understand why we always bring in foreign coaches," said another former captain Rashid Latif.

Raja said Pakistan cricket fans have started to lose interest in their team.

"Lots of fans are disheartened," he said. "Why do someone watch Pakistan's test cricket, because when you surf television channels and watch quality and classy cricket elsewhere, why should someone stop and watch how low can they (Pakistan cricketers) go."

Pakistan's top-order batters have long been struggling — especially Babar Azam, who hasn't scored a half century in his last 16 innings. Left-hander Saud Shakeel had a promising start, but let the team down against Bangladesh. Opener Abdullah Shafique could score only 43 in four innings against Bangladesh and added to Pakistan batting woes.

"Only (Mohammad) Rizwan fights," Raja said. "The overall (cricket) structure is shaken and when the foundation is shaken, sponsors are shaken, fans are shaken and expectations are dead."

Pakistan has little time to recover, with England lined up for a three-test series next month in Pakistan.

"They (players) have to take onus," Raja said. "This is the season to make a name. You have to get yourself up mentally and there are no excuses. ... When there's no blame game, only then you can go upward." ■

BANGLADESH REGISTER HISTORIC CRICKET TRIUMPH IN PAKISTAN

The recent civil unrest that toppled Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina caused Bangladesh to be stripped of the Women's Twenty20 World Cup, and in the past week, the country has been hit by deadly flash floods that have affected millions of people...

BY STAFF WRITER

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto believed his team's first test cricket series win over Pakistan will give his compatriots reason to smile amid ongoing difficulties.

The recent civil unrest that toppled Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina caused Bangladesh to be stripped of the Women's Twenty20 World Cup, and in the past week, the country has been hit by deadly flash floods that have affected millions of people.

"For the last 1 1/2 months, everyone (in Bangladesh) has struggled a lot," Shanto said after Bangladesh beat Pakistan by six wickets in the second test on the last day.

"We all know cricket is a very emotional thing in our country, so I hope they will get some smiles because we've won the series."

Bangladesh followed an epic 10-wicket victory in the first test at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium with a comeback win in the second test on the same ground. Bangladesh was 26-6 in its first innings but Litton Das and Mehidy Hasan Miraz batted them to just a 12-run deficit. Then the fast bowlers dismissed Pakistan for 172 and Bangladesh reached the winning target of 185 in 56 overs.

"The belief in the dressing room is very different this time," Shanto said. "We were nervous (at 26-6) but the way Litton and Miraz batted ... we believed that those guys will take us to a good position."

Shanto was impressed with the work ethic of young fast bowlers Hasan Mahmud and Nahid Rana, who shared nine wickets in the second innings.

"We read the conditions very well," Shanto said. "The bowlers did their job ... and just tried to bowl in the channel for a long time, not like one or two overs. The bowlers did a lot of hard work and that's why we got the result."

Bangladesh is scheduled to tour India this month for two tests and three Twenty20s, and Shanto said the historic win in Pakistan — only their second series triumph away from home — boosts their morale.

"This series (in Pakistan) gives us a lot of confidence," Shanto said. ■

FEATURE

5 REASONS WHY SURYAKUMAR YADAV MUST STICK TO T20I CRICKET

At 34 years old, Suryakumar Yadav is at a crucial juncture in his career. While age may be a concern for some cricketers, in SKY's case, it could be a blessing in disguise. By focusing solely on T20Is, he can maximize his longevity in the game...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Suryakumar Yadav, often referred to as SKY, has solidified his place as one of the greatest T20I batters in the world. His remarkable consistency, audacious stroke play, and natural flair for the shortest format have made him a household name in cricket. In 2024, SKY etched his name in history with a stunning catch to dismiss David Miller, sealing India's victory in the T20 World Cup. Following the retirement of stalwarts like Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, and Ravindra Jadeja, SKY was rightly handed the captaincy of the Indian T20I side.

As Suryakumar Yadav embarks on this new chapter in his career, there are compelling reasons why he should focus solely on T20I cricket. Here are five reasons why SKY must stick to T20I cricket and continue to be a crucial asset for Team India.

1. FOCUS ON BUILDING A NEW TEAM AND CORE

With the departure of seasoned campaigners like Kohli, Rohit, and Jadeja, Indian cricket is undergoing a significant transition. The team is in a rebuilding phase, where a new core needs to be established to carry the legacy forward. Suryakumar Yadav, with his wealth of experience and understanding of the game, is ideally positioned to lead this transition in the T20I format. By concentrating exclusively on T20Is, SKY can channel all his energy into moulding a young and dynamic team. He can identify emerging talents,

nurture them, and integrate them into the team, ensuring that India remains a formidable force in T20 cricket. His ability to lead from the front, coupled with his calm demeanour, makes him the perfect captain to guide India through this transformative period.

2. AGE AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO CAPTAIN MULTIPLE T20 WORLD CUPS

At 34 years old, Suryakumar Yadav is at a crucial juncture in his career. While age may be a concern for some cricketers, in SKY's case, it could be a blessing in disguise. By focusing solely on T20Is, he can maximize his longevity in the game. This would allow him to captain India in at least two T20 World Cups, a rare opportunity for any player. The T20 format is less physically demanding than ODIs and Tests, which means SKY can maintain peak fitness levels and continue to perform at the highest level for a few more years. His experience, combined with his fitness, can make a significant impact on the team's performance in global tournaments. By committing to T20Is, SKY can ensure that India remains a top contender in the upcoming T20 World Cups.

3. PAVING THE WAY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION IN 50-OVER CRICKET

Indian cricket is blessed with a wealth of young talent, especially in the 50-over format. With the next generation eager to make their mark, experienced players like Suryakumar Yadav must step aside from ODI cricket to give the youngsters more opportunities. By focusing on T20Is, SKY can allow the next generation to take charge of the 50-over format, helping India build a strong and competitive team for future World Cups. This transition would not only benefit the team but also ensure that SKY's legacy as a T20I specialist remains intact. Moreover, by stepping away from the ODI format, SKY can mentor the young players, offering them guidance and sharing his invaluable experience. This mentorship can help bridge the gap between the seasoned players and the upcoming talents, ensuring a smooth transition for Indian cricket.

4. BALANCING WORKLOAD AND ENSURING ADEQUATE REST

Cricket is a demanding sport, both physically and mentally. The modern cricket calendar is packed with bilateral series, tournaments, and franchise cricket, which can take a toll on a player's body. By dedicating himself solely to T20Is and the Indian Premier League

(IPL), Suryakumar Yadav can manage his workload more effectively. This decision would allow him to get enough rest and avoid burnout, which is crucial for maintaining peak performance in high-pressure situations. The T20 format, with its shorter duration and fewer matches, offers SKY the perfect balance between playing competitive cricket and getting adequate rest. By managing his workload, SKY can ensure that he remains fit and fresh for the most important T20I fixtures, including World Cups and other marquee events. This approach would benefit not only his personal performance but also the overall success of the Indian team.

5. A CHANCE TO RETIRE AS THE MOST PROLIFIC T20I BATTER

Suryakumar Yadav's T20I career has been nothing short of extraordinary. In just 71 T20Is, he has amassed 2,432 runs with four centuries and 20 half-centuries, at an astonishing strike rate of 147. His meteoric rise in T20I cricket is a testament to his skill, determination, and ability to adapt to the demands of the format. To put things into perspective, Rohit Sharma, the current leading run-scorer in T20Is, took 14 years to accumulate 4,231 runs in 159 matches. In contrast, SKY has achieved nearly half of that in just three years. If he continues to play T20Is, there's no doubt that he could surpass Rohit Sharma's record and retire as the most prolific T20I batter of all time. This incredible feat would cement SKY's legacy as one of the greatest T20I players in the history of the game. By focusing on T20Is, SKY can continue to break records, entertain fans, and contribute to India's success in the shortest format.

CONCLUSION

Suryakumar Yadav's journey in T20I cricket has been nothing short of remarkable. As he takes on the mantle of leadership, there are compelling reasons for him to focus solely on T20I cricket. From building a new team and core to managing his workload and chasing records, SKY has the potential to leave an indelible mark on the game. By sticking to T20I cricket, Suryakumar Yadav can not only enhance his legacy but also ensure that Indian cricket continues to dominate the world stage in the shortest format. The future of Indian T20I cricket looks bright with SKY at the helm, and fans can look forward to witnessing more spectacular performances from one of the greatest T20I batters of all time. ■

5 REASONS WHY PAKISTAN IS OVERRATED IN TEST CRICKET

One of the primary reasons for Pakistan's struggles in Test cricket is the imbalance in team selections. The frequent introduction of new players disrupts team cohesion, causing tensions between newcomers and established member...

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BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Pakistan's Test cricket team has long been a subject of high expectations and occasional brilliance, but recent performances have cast doubt on their standing as a cricketing powerhouse. Their recent home loss to Bangladesh, following a controversial declaration, highlighted underlying issues that have plagued the team. Currently positioned 8th in the World Test Championship (WTC) 2023-2025 standings, with just 2 wins from 6 matches, Pakistan's struggles are evident. The team's underperformance is not a new trend; they finished 5th in the 2019-2021 WTC cycle and slipped to 7th in the 2021-2023 cycle. With frequent changes in team selection, questionable captaincy decisions, internal politics, and an apparent reluctance to adapt to modern cricketing standards, Pakistan's Test team faces a challenging road ahead. This article explores five key reasons why Pakistan may be considered overrated in Test cricket.

1. INCONSISTENT WORLD TEST CHAMPIONSHIP PERFORMANCES

Pakistan's performance in the World Test Championship (WTC) cycles reveals a troubling trend of inconsistency. In the WTC 2019-2021 cycle, Pakistan finished 5th, having played 6 series and won only 3. The subsequent cycle, 2021-2023, saw a decline, with Pakistan dropping to 7th and winning just 4 out of 14 series. Their current standing in the WTC 2023-2025 cycle, where they occupy 8th place with only 2 wins from 6 matches, underscores this ongoing issue. This pattern of underachievement across successive WTC cycles highlights Pakistan's struggles to maintain a consistent performance level in Test cricket. The repeated failure to secure strong positions in the WTC standings reflects deeper issues within their cricketing structure and approach. Addressing these inconsistencies will be crucial for improving their performance and achieving better results on the international stage.

2. TEAM SELECTION IMBALANCES

One of the primary reasons for Pakistan's struggles in Test cricket is the imbalance in team selections. The frequent introduction of new players disrupts team cohesion, causing tensions between newcomers and established members. This lack of stability in the playing XI leads to constant changes, impacting the team's ability to develop a consistent strategy and build effective partnerships. The continuous rotation of players affects on-field performance and fosters an environment of uncertainty and unrest. When players are frequently swapped in and out, it becomes

challenging to establish settled batting and bowling combinations, which are crucial for success in Test cricket. This inconsistency not only hampers team dynamics but also undermines the development of a reliable game plan. As a result, Pakistan's Test team struggles to perform consistently, reflecting the negative impact of frequent and unbalanced team selections on their overall effectiveness.

3. QUESTIONABLE CAPTAINCY DECISIONS

Questionable captaincy decisions have significantly impacted Pakistan's Test cricket performance. Recent captains have faced criticism for their strategic choices, which have often seemed ill-timed or poorly thought out. For example, aggressive declarations that backfire, such as the recent loss to Bangladesh after declaring early, illustrate a lack of effective tactical planning. Effective captaincy in Test cricket requires balancing aggressive play with strategic prudence, especially in high-pressure situations. Poor decision-making, whether in field placements, declarations, or handling of players, can lead to detrimental outcomes and affect team morale. The inability to make crucial decisions at the right moments undermines the team's chances of success and contributes to their overall underperformance. As captaincy plays a pivotal role in guiding the team through the complexities of Test cricket, these questionable decisions highlight a significant area of concern and contribute to Pakistan's struggles in the format.

4. INTERNAL POLITICS AND ADMINISTRATION ISSUES

Internal politics and administrative issues within the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) have significantly impacted the performance of the Test team. Frequent changes in management, coaching staff, and selection committees create an unstable environment, disrupting team cohesion and strategic continuity. This constant turnover not only affects the team's morale but also leads to inconsistent decision-making, as new administrators and coaches often bring different priorities and approaches. Moreover, political maneuvering within the PCB can overshadow cricketing priorities, leading to decisions driven by

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personal or political interests rather than what is best for the team. These internal conflicts and administrative challenges contribute to a chaotic environment that undermines the team's focus and preparation. As a result, Pakistan's Test team struggles with instability and inconsistency, further contributing to their overrated status and difficulties in achieving sustained success on the international stage.

5. FAILURE TO ADAPT TO MODERN CRICKETING STANDARDS

Pakistan's failure to adapt to modern cricketing standards has become increasingly evident when compared to leading teams like India and Australia. In today's Test cricket, fitness, specialized roles, and data-driven strategies are crucial for success. Teams like India and Australia excel in these areas, utilizing advanced sports science and analytics to enhance player performance and make strategic decisions. They focus on rigorous fitness regimes, detailed match preparations, and tactical innovations, which have become integral to their dominance. In contrast, Pakistan's approach remains somewhat traditional, often lagging in embracing these modern advancements. This reluctance or difficulty in integrating contemporary practices hinders their ability to compete effectively against teams that leverage these modern standards. As India and Australia continue to set benchmarks with their progressive approaches, Pakistan's failure to keep pace with these evolving standards limits their ability to achieve consistent success in Test cricket.

Pakistan's Test cricket team faces several challenges that contribute to their overrated status. Inconsistent performances in World Test Championship cycles, imbalances in team selections, questionable captaincy decisions, internal politics, and failure to adapt to modern cricketing standards are key factors that highlight the issues within the team. Addressing these problems will be crucial for Pakistan if they aim to improve their standing and prove their mettle in the international Test arena. Until these underlying issues are resolved, Pakistan's Test team will continue to grapple with the perception of being overrated, struggling to translate potential into consistent success on the field. ■

TOP STORIES

“The decision to join U.S. Soccer wasn’t just about football for me”

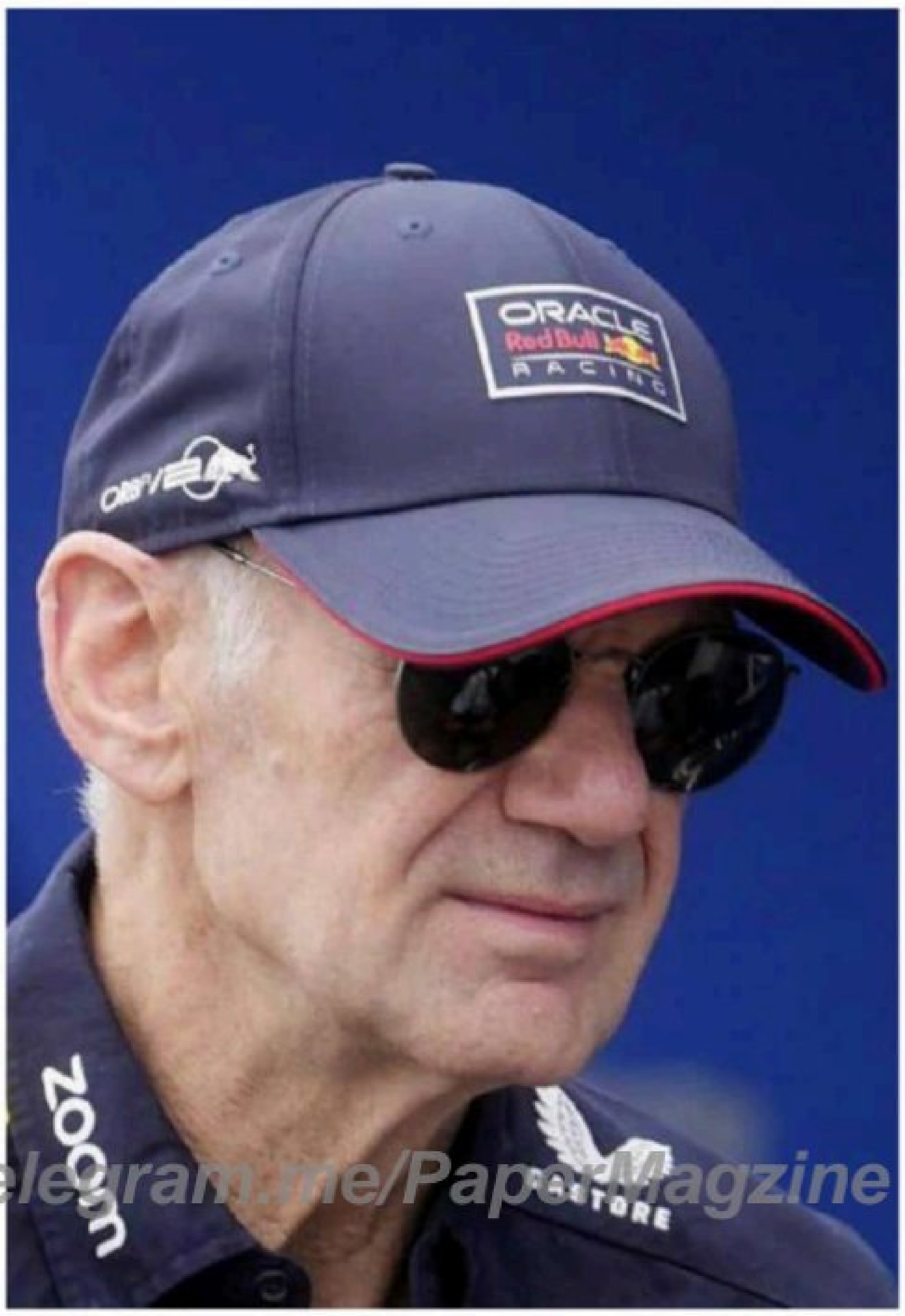
- Mauricio Pochettino on joining the United States men's national team as head coach

“Whenever you’re doubted throughout your career, it makes you more hungry and determined to prove people wrong”

- Harry Kane on his performance for England

F1 CAR DESIGN GREAT TO JOIN ASTON MARTIN

Formula 1's most influential car designer, Adrian Newey, is joining Aston Martin in March 2025 after leaving Red Bull, ending months of speculation over a backroom figure who seemed more in-demand than any driver. Newey has spent nearly two decades with Red Bull and is widely credited with putting the team on its path to dominance in F1. Aston Martin confirmed he's joining a team that has big ambitions to challenge for the title and the backing of billionaire Lawrence Stroll — but no race wins yet. Newey will arrive in his new role as “managing technical partner” in time to help shape how Aston Martin responds to the new F1 car regulations coming for 2026. He'll also be made a shareholder in the team.

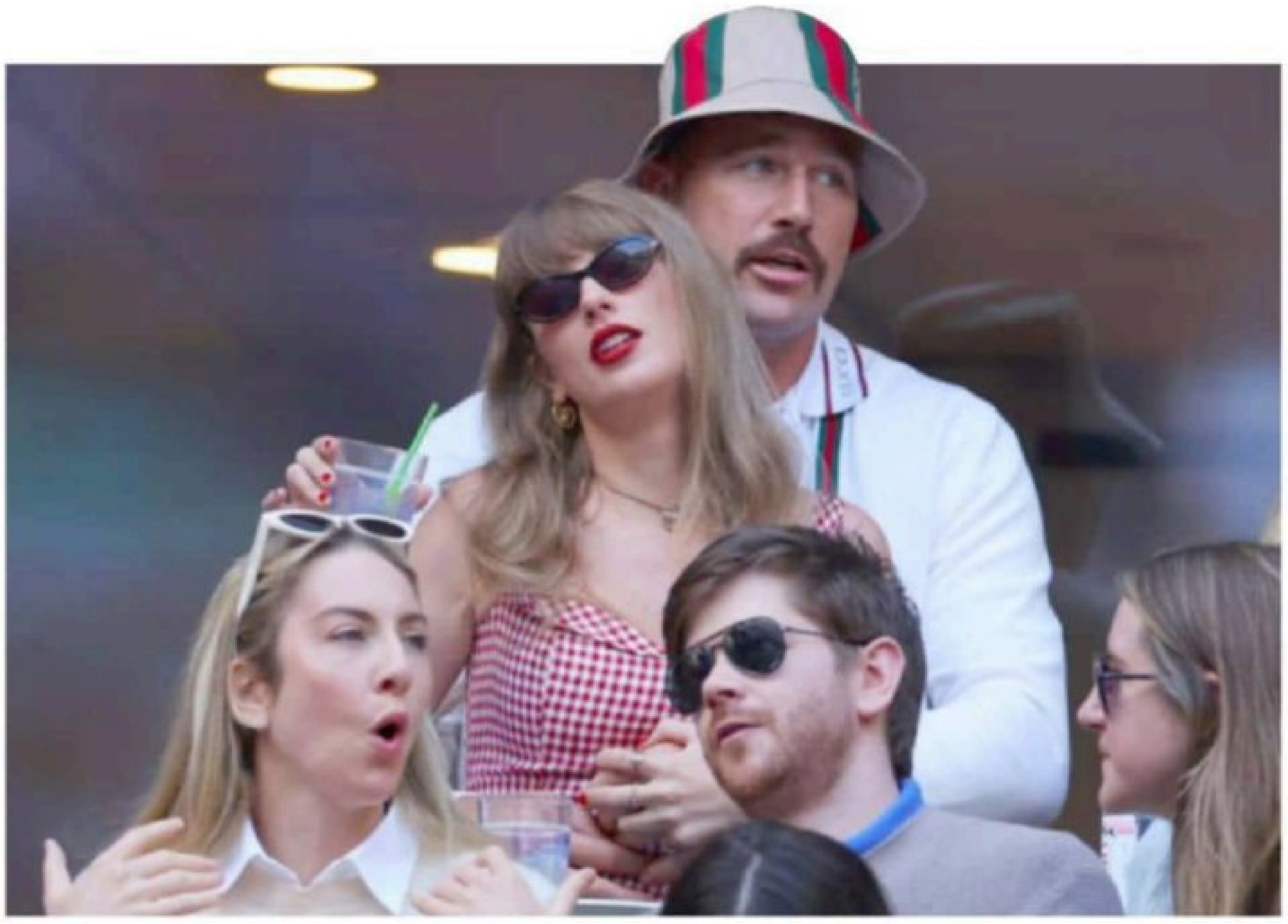


MBAPPÉ REJECTS MEDIATION OFFER

Kylian Mbappé is not ready to compromise with Paris Saint-Germain. The France superstar rejected a mediation offer by the French soccer league’s legal commission in his dispute with his former club over wages and bonuses. PSG officials and Mbappé’s representatives met in Paris after Mbappé asked the commission to get involved. Mbappé, who joined Real Madrid this summer on a free transfer, says PSG owes him 55 million euros ($60 million). In a statement to The Associated Press, Mbappé’s representatives said the player asked the commission to take note of the non-payment of three months’ salary and the last third of a loyalty bonus.

HIGH-PROFILE COUPLE AT THE FINAL

Taylor Swift was at the U.S. Open to watch another Taylor perform. Swift was at the men's final along with Travis Kelce, four days after watching her boyfriend's Kansas City Chiefs open their NFL season with a victory. The singing superstar was wearing a red-and-white checkered dress when she arrived for the match between American Taylor Fritz and Jannik Sinner of Italy. Kelce was dressed in a white shirt and sweater, looking appropriately attired for Wimbledon. The couple sat in a box at Arthur Ashe Stadium along with Patrick Mahomes, Kelce's teammate with the defending Super Bowl champion Chiefs, and his wife, Brittany. The U.S. Open posted a photo on social media of Swift enjoying a Honey Deuce, the tournament's cocktail phenom that runs for $23.



ARGENTINA GOALKEEPER MARTÍNEZ UNDER FIRE

A TV cameraman said Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez “slapped me” after Colombia's 2-1 win in a World Cup qualifying match. Jhonny Jackson told Colombian media he approached Martínez after the final whistle in Barranquilla as the goalkeeper greeted another player. Footage he captured shows the World Cup winner who Argentines know as Dibu hitting the camera, which quickly shakes to the ground after the impact. “Out of the blue he slapped me,” Jackson told RCN Deportes on Wednesday. “I felt angry, very angry. I was working, just like he was. He was playing and I was shooting with my camera." He also sent a message to Martínez: “Dibu, my brother, how are you? I am Jhonny Jackson, the cameraman you assaulted in the match against Colombia. I wanted to tell you it is all good, my brother. Everyone has lost a match in their life. This defeat clearly meant a lot to you. But look ahead, Dibu.”

ENZO FERNANDEZ GETS 6-MONTH DRIVING BAN

Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez has been banned from driving for six months because of motoring offenses in Wales. The 23-year-old Fernandez did not appear in court for sentencing. He had been found guilty earlier this year on two charges of failing to identify the driver of a Porsche Cayenne. A driver of the car allegedly ran a red light in the town of Llanelli in November and was caught speeding in Swansea last December. It was not proven that Fernandez was the driver of the vehicle. He also was ordered to pay 3,020 pounds ($4,000) in fines and costs.

MAN CITY BEAT MAN UNITED IN SHOOTOUT TO WIN COMMUNITY SHIELD

The game went straight to penalties — there is no extra time in the Community Shield — and Silva saw his shot saved by Andre Onana off City's first attempt. Jadon Sancho failed off United's fourth kick...

WINNERS 2024
THE FA COMMUNITY SHIELD

BY STAFF WRITER

Chastened by a decisive penalty miss at the recent European Championship, Manuel Akanji was happy to be placed near the end of Manchester City's list of spot-kick takers during a shootout against Manchester United in the Community Shield. Imagine how the Switzerland defender felt, then, when the opportunity fell to him to score the winning penalty at Wembley Stadium.

"I let the others shoot first," Akanji said, "because obviously when you miss a penalty, you don't go into the next one with that much confidence."

This time he made no mistake. After a 1-1 draw in regulation time, City beat United 7-6 in a shootout to win the traditional curtain-raiser to the English soccer season between the winners of last season's Premier League (City) and FA Cup (United). City's players rushed from the center circle to celebrate with Akanji after he lifted the clinching penalty straight down the middle and into the roof of the net. In the Euro 2024 quarterfinals last month, Akanji was left with "deep emptiness, deep sadness" — in the words of Switzerland coach Murat Yakin — when he was the only player to not convert a penalty in a shootout loss to England. On that occasion, Akanji took Switzerland's first attempt.

"He missed it in the Euros," City manager Pep Guardiola said, "and I love he had the personality to take it."

City ended a run of three straight losses in the Community Shield — to Leicester, Liverpool then Arsenal over the past three years — and went some way to avenging the loss to United in the FA Cup final 77 days ago. Guardiola's team was beaten 2-1 to miss out on another league-and-cup double. It looked like United would be claiming another Wembley win over its neighbor when second-half substitute Alejandro Garnacho cut inside and drove a low shot inside the near post in the 82nd minute. City equalized in the 89th when Bernardo Silva, also a substitute, headed in from Oscar Bobb's cross.

The game went straight to penalties — there is no extra time in the Community Shield — and Silva saw his shot saved by Andre Onana off City's first attempt. Jadon Sancho failed off United's fourth kick as Ederson tipped the shot onto the post. It was more penalty heartache for Sancho, who was one of three England players to miss in the shootout loss to Italy in the Euro 2020 final at Wembley. United defender Jonny Evans, the team's eighth penalty-taker, chipped his effort over the crossbar to give Akanji the chance to win it for City. Against England in Dusseldorf, the center back placed his kick to his right and had it saved by Jordan Pickford, but this time he hit it down the middle.

While United fielded a close-to-full-strength team, City was still without a raft of key players following the Euro 2024 final between Spain and England. Rodri, Phil Foden, Kyle Walker and John Stones were all missing, while Kevin De Bruyne started on the bench and was a late substitute.

"We're happy to start the season in the way we have and obviously there's a lot to come," said Ruben Dias, who was City's captain for the match. "It's another trophy and we're always happy to collect trophies. We've just had a long season and we still don't have a full squad back but it is very good for us to start this way."

Guardiola has now won 18 trophies — including the Community Shield three times — since joining City in 2016.

The Premier League season starts Friday, when United hosts Fulham.

"It hurts in your stomach — you have to feel pain and we have to hurt," United manager Erik ten Hag said. "We have to take this belief in to the league." ■

STEPHEN CURRY'S BARRAGE SEALS ANOTHER OLYMPIC MEN'S BASKETBALL TITLE FOR USA

Kevin Durant — the first four-time men's gold medalist in Olympic basketball history — scored 15 for the Americans, as did Devin Booker. LeBron James, wearing metallic gold shoes that needed no explanation, scored 14...

BY STAFF WRITER

Stephen Curry was thinking about this two years ago, after winning his fourth NBA title with the Golden State Warriors. The only thing left for him to win was Olympic gold. And in the ultimate moment, he made sure that medal would be his. The U.S. is atop the international men's basketball world once again, after Curry scored 24 points — all on 3-pointers — and led the way to a 98-87 win over France in the final at the Paris Games. It was the fifth consecutive gold medal for the U.S. and the 17th in 20 all-time appearances for the Americans at the Games.

"You just stay confident, stay present and don't get rattled by the moment," said Curry, who had 17 3-pointers in his last two games, starting with nine against Serbia to get to the gold-medal game.

Added U.S. coach Steve Kerr: "Steph earned this." Curry made four 3-pointers in the final 2:43, including the one that just sealed the win with 1:19 remaining. It put the U.S. up 93-84 and he skipped down the court letting out a yell, shaking his jersey so everyone could see the "USA" across the front. If that wasn't enough, one more followed with about 30 seconds left — along with the go-to-sleep move where he puts his hands together on the side of his face. "Night night," he calls it, and he came prepared, with a special shirt to wear after the game for a champagne-and-cigars celebration. "Nuit nuit," it said, the French translation.

Good night. Game over. Gold won. Again.

"For me to get a gold medal is insane, and I thank God for the opportunity to experience it," Curry said.

Kevin Durant — the first four-time men's gold medalist in Olympic basketball history — scored 15 for the Americans, as did Devin Booker. LeBron James, wearing metallic gold shoes that needed no explanation, scored 14 for the U.S. as he won his fourth Olympic medal and third gold.

"Super humbled that I can still play this game," James said. "Played at a high level, played with 11 other great players and a great coaching staff and went on and did it for our country. It was a great moment around."

For the second consecutive Olympics, the French had to watch the Americans hold up U.S. flags in

FRANCE
32
FRANCE

celebration after the title game. The French lost to the U.S. 87-82 in Tokyo three years ago, and this one was down to the final minutes.

That is, until Curry took over.

"I think we might be the only team in the world whose fans are ashamed of them if they get a silver medal," said Kerr, the Golden State coach whose two-summer run with the U.S. ends with a 21-3 record and Olympic gold — 11-0 this summer. "That's the pressure that we face. But our players, and you saw Steph, they love the pressure. They appreciate this atmosphere and they were fantastic."

Victor Wembanyama, the NBA Rookie of the Year for San Antonio in his first Olympic final, was brilliant for France, scoring 26 points — the second-most ever against the U.S. in a gold-medal game, one behind the 27 that Drazen Dalipagic scored for Yugoslavia in 1976. "I'm learning," Wembanyama said. "And I'm worried for the opponents in a couple of years." Wembanyama covered his face in a towel afterward as the Americans celebrated. Guerschon Yabusele scored 20 for the hosts.

"For sure, it's a disappointment because we expected we could do it," France coach Vincent Collet said. "But we have to recognize at the end that they are better. We are very close ... When they make fantastic shots, that's the difference."

The U.S. lead was 14 early in the third, looking poised to pull away. But the offense quickly went cold and when Evan Fournier connected on a 3-pointer with 3:05 left in the quarter the lead was down to 65-59 after a 12-4 run by the hosts.

And with a chance to go up double digits headed to the fourth, a big U.S. blunder gave France another jolt of momentum. Anthony Edwards and Durant got their signals crossed on a pass that led to a turnover, Nando De Colo scored to beat the buzzer and the U.S. lead was only 72-66 going into the final 10 minutes. It got as close as three. No closer, thanks to Curry. He hit four 3-pointers in a span of 2:12, the last one of them a bit of the circus variety, and they all immediately went into Olympic lore.

"A big shot to put us up six. That kind of settled

PARIS 20
JAMES
6
USA
4

everything," Curry said. "And then the rhythm, the avalanche came, and thankfully the other three went in. That was an unbelievable moment. I've been blessed to play basketball at a high level for a very long time. This ranks very high in terms of excitement and the sense of relief, getting to the finish line."

It was the eighth time in Olympic history — and Sunday's women's final between the U.S. and France will mark the ninth — that the home team got to play for basketball gold. Home teams are now 5-3 in those games, 2-1 on the men's side. The U.S. men and women both won in 1984 and 1996; the women of the Soviet Union won in 1980, while Australia's women lost to the U.S. in 2000 and Japan's women also lost to the U.S. at the Tokyo Games three years ago. For James, it was one more thing for the neverending list that is his legacy. For Durant, it was history with four golds. For Booker, Anthony Davis, Jayson Tatum and Bam Adebayo, it was a second gold. For Jrue Holiday, it was a second gold to match his wife — soccer great Lauren Cheney Holiday — for the family lead. For Derrick White, Tyrese Haliburton, Joel Embiid and Edwards, it was the first Olympic title.

"This has been an amazing experience, a beautiful experience," Durant said.

And for Curry, it was a long time coming after he wasn't available for previous Olympics. The Americans couldn't have been more thrilled that he was there for this one.

"I was smilin', cheesin', having the best time of my life," Curry said.

He likened it to a Game 7 on the road, which it basically was. He's had enormous success in those moments: a 50-point outburst to lead Golden State past Sacramento in 2023 and a 27-point, 10-assist, nine-rebound performance to win a do-or-die game in Houston in 2018. And now, this.

"It's right up there with all of the greatest games of his career," Kerr said. "The shot-making was just incredible. But under the circumstances, on the road, in Paris, against France for a gold medal, this is storybook stuff. But that's what Steph does. He likes to be in storybooks." ■

FEATURE

AT THE PARIS OLYMPICS, CITIES AND COUNTRIES WERE DISCREETLY MAKING THEIR CASE TO HOST IN 2036

If the 2036 Olympics must go to Asia — a logical option to follow Paris, Los Angeles in 2028 and Brisbane in 2032 — then Indonesia will push its case as a fast-emerging economy of 280 million people...

BY STAFF WRITER

If historic waterway settings are the new must-have accessory for Olympic host cities, then Istanbul's mayor wants the IOC to know his city has one. If the key to getting the 2036 Summer Games is having hosted world championships in top-tier Olympic sports, then Qatar can point to its track record over the past decade. If winning over the International Olympic Committee is about ambition, finance and relationship-building, then India's project backed by the Ambani family and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is well placed.

Saudi Arabia is following a similar path and in Paris sealed an Esports Olympic Games hosting deal with the IOC for 12 years, beyond the next Summer Games that is available to be awarded.

If the 2036 Olympics must go to Asia — a logical option to follow Paris, Los Angeles in 2028 and Brisbane in 2032 — then Indonesia will push its case as a fast-emerging economy of 280 million people.

In Paris, interested parties discreetly made their case for hosting the Olympics in a process run by the IOC that is now more discreet, less obviously a campaign and which critics say is too opaque. It can end with a winner far quicker than the old way of holding a multi-candidate vote seven years before the Games open. Brisbane outpaced Qatar to get the 2032 award 11

years in advance. If just one thing is clear, the 2036 Olympics host will be known long before 2029 and strongly shaped by the high bar Paris has set.

"I mostly focus on what the IOC expects, what they dream of, what the world wants to see," Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu told The Associated Press in an interview in Paris. "Personally, I'm not really interested to know what city is the competitor."

The IOC has said it has a "double-digit" number of cities or countries in talks, maybe informal at this stage, about their interest in hosting a future Summer Games which can be later than 2036. Still, those that hosted hospitality houses in Paris over the past two weeks were showing clear intent. At the opening of India House on July 27, IOC member Nita Ambani said hosting an Olympics was "a dream that belongs to 1.4 billion Indians."

The Ambani family, India's richest and owners of the Reliance Industries conglomerate, now has a global reputation for lavish hosting. Celebrations over several months for their son Anant's wedding in Mumbai drew world leaders, A-list performers and several IOC members who ultimately vote to confirm Games hosts.

Qatar did not have a public hospitality venue, though the ruling Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, was in Paris for meetings of the IOC of which he has been a member since 2002, and the opening ceremony.

Istanbul House opened in the final week of the Paris Olympics, reminding visitors the city will host the 2027 European Games, a kind of audition project.

"You are also competing with the past experiences of Olympic Games," İmamoğlu said in translated comments. "You need to do better than what has been done in the past."

भारत
INDIA HOUSE
भारत
Welcome
स्वागतम्
Bienvenue
ENTRÉE / ENTRANCE
Ready to play
#CHEERINDIA

What Paris has done is show an IOC focused on sustainability that the Olympics can be staged without building white elephant venues that stand long after the closing ceremony as a reminder of wasted taxpayer costs.

Los Angeles in 2028 will go further using only already existing or temporary venues. This goal is met by taking two sports that could not be staged locally — softball and canoe slalom — about 1,300 miles (2,000 kilometers) east to Oklahoma City.

Indonesia hopes to impress Olympic evaluators by having hosted the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta and Palembang. The Asian Games has more sports and athletes than the Olympics, and Saudi Arabia does not host it until 2034, in Riyadh. Qatar did in 2006 in Doha and will again in 2030.

"Indonesia has the infrastructure, the ambition and the willingness to do it," Indonesia's team leader at the Paris Olympics, Anindya Bakrie, said. When Indonesia would not host Israel games at the Under-20 World Cup in men's soccer last year, FIFA moved the tournament from the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation just weeks before it opened.

"By saying that we want to bid for 2036, it also means that we know that we have to deal with the issue. If we do it right," Bakrie said, "we have enough time to educate the public."

And if Istanbul is to win — in 2036 or 2040 — why not another athlete parade at an opening ceremony by the Bosphorus strait that connects Europe and Asia?

"If you have the scenario, the right choreography, it can be very formidable," İmamoğlu said. "You can dream of having 500,000 people watching the inauguration in such a setting." ■

HIDEKI MATSUYAMA WINS FEDEX CUP PLAYOFFS OPENER

Birdies on the final two holes — among the toughest on the TPC Southwind — gave the Japanese star an even-par 70 and a two-shot victory over Xander Schauffele and Viktor Hovland, who thought they were playing for cash and FedEx Cup points...

SRIXON
SRIXON
リポビタン

BY STAFF WRITER

Hideki Matsuyama could feel the tournament getting away from him, an odd sensation considering he had gone 27 holes without a bogey and had a five-shot lead just an hour earlier. Even more improbable was how it ended. On the verge of a collapse, Matsuyama rolled in a 25-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole to regain the lead and then hit two shots as precise as any he hit all day for one last birdie to win a wild PGA Tour postseason opener at the FedEx St. Jude Championship.

Birdies on the final two holes — among the toughest on the TPC Southwind — gave the Japanese star an even-par 70 and a two-shot victory over Xander Schauffele and Viktor Hovland, who thought they were playing for cash and FedEx Cup points until Matsuyama's mini-meltdown.

A three-putt bogey on the 12th. A tee shot into the water on the par-3 14th, where Matsuyama did well to escape with bogey. Two chips to reach the 15th green and a double bogey. When he saw a leaderboard on the 16th hole, it confirmed what Matsuyama feared.

"I felt today's victory slipping away at that point because 17 and 18 are difficult holes enough, let alone to birdie them," Matsuyama said through his interpreter. He birdied them both for his 10th career PGA Tour victory and first FedEx Cup playoffs title.

The stakes suddenly were high for everyone in the final hour of what had been a sleepy, steamy tournament. It was tight at the top, and just as tense on the bubble to determine the top 50 players in the FedEx Cup who advanced to next week.

How tense? Consider Nick Dunlap, who went from a chance to win the tournament to needing his best drive of the week just to stay in the top 50 and extend his

season. He was as clutch as Matsuyama off the 18th tee, closing with a par for a 69 to tie for fifth and move on.

“It was weird,” Dunlap said. “I went from on 17, I tried to attack the pin. I thought I still had a chance to win the golf tournament. Then not getting up-and-down, and then I’m questioning if I’m inside the bubble or not. It was very stressful.”

Tom Kim looked certain to finish in the top 50 until a 6-6-6 finish on his card ended his season. Schauffele started nine shots behind and waited to see if he would get in a playoff. Hovland had a one-shot lead with two holes to play. Scottie Scheffler, who shot 66 and finished fourth, was still in the game on the 17th hole.

Ultimately, it came down to Matsuyama. The collapse was stunning. So was the response. “He just never seemed to let it get to him. It was really impressive,” said Dunlap, who played in the final group with Matsuyama. "That’s why he’s got a green jacket and a ton of other things. It was definitely cool for me to watch. He deserves it. He was impressive all day.

Hovland, the defending FedEx Cup champion, came into the postseason at No. 57 without a guarantee he would be able to defend his title in the BMW Championship next week. And then he had a chance to win, taking the lead with his birdie on the 16th. He gave it back by failing to save par from a bunker on the 17th and then missed a 9-foot birdie putt on the 18th for a 66. He wound up a runner-up with Schauffele, who played bogey-free for a 63. Hovland moved to No. 16, not only getting into next week but locking up a spot in the Tour Championship. But it wasn't over just yet. The final group on the final hole — the hardest of the day — came down to this: Matsuyama needed par to win, Dunlap needed par to move from No. 67 into

the top 50. A bogey would have bumped the former U.S. Amateur champion out of the top 50. Both split the middle of the fairway. Dunlap hit his approach to just outside 20 feet, while Matsuyama hit 8-iron at the flag, with water to the left. It settled just under 6 feet away. Matsuyama, who finished at 17-under 263, won for the second time this year. He shot 62 in the final round to win the Genesis Invitational at Riviera. Coming off a bronze medal at the Olympic, his performance — except for that awful four-hole stretch — was golden.

He won $3.6 million and moved from No. 8 to No. 3 in the FedEx Cup. It was quite a week for the Japanese star, who had to find a fill-in caddie and could only work with his coach over the phone. All of them were out to dinner in London on their way home from the Paris Olympics when someone stole their bag when they weren't looking.

The thief got Matsuyama's wallet and the passports of his caddie and coach. They had to return to Japan and work on getting expedited replacements. Matsuyama pressed on like it was another work week and came up with his first postseason victory.

Hovland, Dunlap and Eric Cole (No. 54) moved into the top 50. Cole did it in style with a 63, despite a bogey on the closing hole. Falling out of the top 50 were Kim (No. 43), Mackenzie Hughes (No. 48) and Jake Knapp (No. 50). Kim was poised to advance until it took him two shots to get out of a greenside bunker on the par-5 16th (bogey), two chips to get to the green on the 17th (double bogey) and a tee shot into the water on the 18th (double bogey).

"This season has just been ... it's just been like this," Kim said. "I've played really good golf, and then had some tough finishes. I feel like 2024 has really kicked me in the butt." ■

FEATURE

TOP-RANKED JANNIK SINNER AND WOMEN'S NO. 2 ARYNA SABALENKA WIN TITLES IN CINCINNATI

An American man hasn't won the title in Cincinnati since Andy Roddick in 2006. Sabalenka moved up a spot to No. 2 in the rankings before the match...

BY STAFF WRITER

Top-ranked Jannik Sinner and women's No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka earned straight-set victories in the finals of the Cincinnati Open, the first titles at the tournament for both players. Sabalenka defeated Jessica Pegula 6-3, 7-5 for her first title since the Australian Open in January. Sinner, who turned 23, beat American Frances Tiafoe 7-6 (4), 6-2 to become the youngest Cincinnati champion since 21-year-old Andy Murray won in 2008.

“I'm very happy to be in the position where I am," Sinner said. "I'm just trying to keep going this way mentally. It's important to recover to be ready for New York. That's the most important thing.”

The U.S. Open begins on Aug. 26 in New York. Sinner and Tiafoe were both playing in their first Cincinnati finals with their previous best results being the third round. Tiafoe forced a tiebreak in the first set, but three straight errors led to a 7-6 defeat. Sinner had a 5-1 lead in the second before Tiafoe saved three match points to make it 5-2 before Sinner was able to serve out for the win. Tiafoe had a less conventional path to the final. He won the first set in the quarterfinals on Saturday before Hubert Hurkacz retired with a calf injury then saved two match points to defeat Holger Rune in three sets in the semis.

An American man hasn't won the title in Cincinnati since Andy Roddick in 2006. Sabalenka moved up a spot to No. 2 in the rankings before the match, then didn't lose a set en route to her 15th WTA title. She had never gotten past the semifinals at Cincinnati, losing three times in that round.

The 26-year-old Sabalenka can now be considered a favorite at the U.S. Open. The Belarusian missed Wimbledon with a shoulder injury, then returned to the tour at Washington two weeks ago.

“I would say that I'm really playing great tennis,” Sabalenka said. “Probably not the best tennis I can play but I'm definitely getting there. Hopefully at the U.S. Open I can reach even higher levels.”

Against Pegula, Sabalenka took 17 minutes to build a 4-1 lead in the first set. Pegula, who double-faulted five times, broke serve for the first time to tie the second set at 5-all, but Sabalenka won the next two games to finish off the 1-hour, 14-minute match.

“She was playing at a high level and never really came down,” Pegula said. “When she's serving really well, it's tough, especially on these fast courts.”

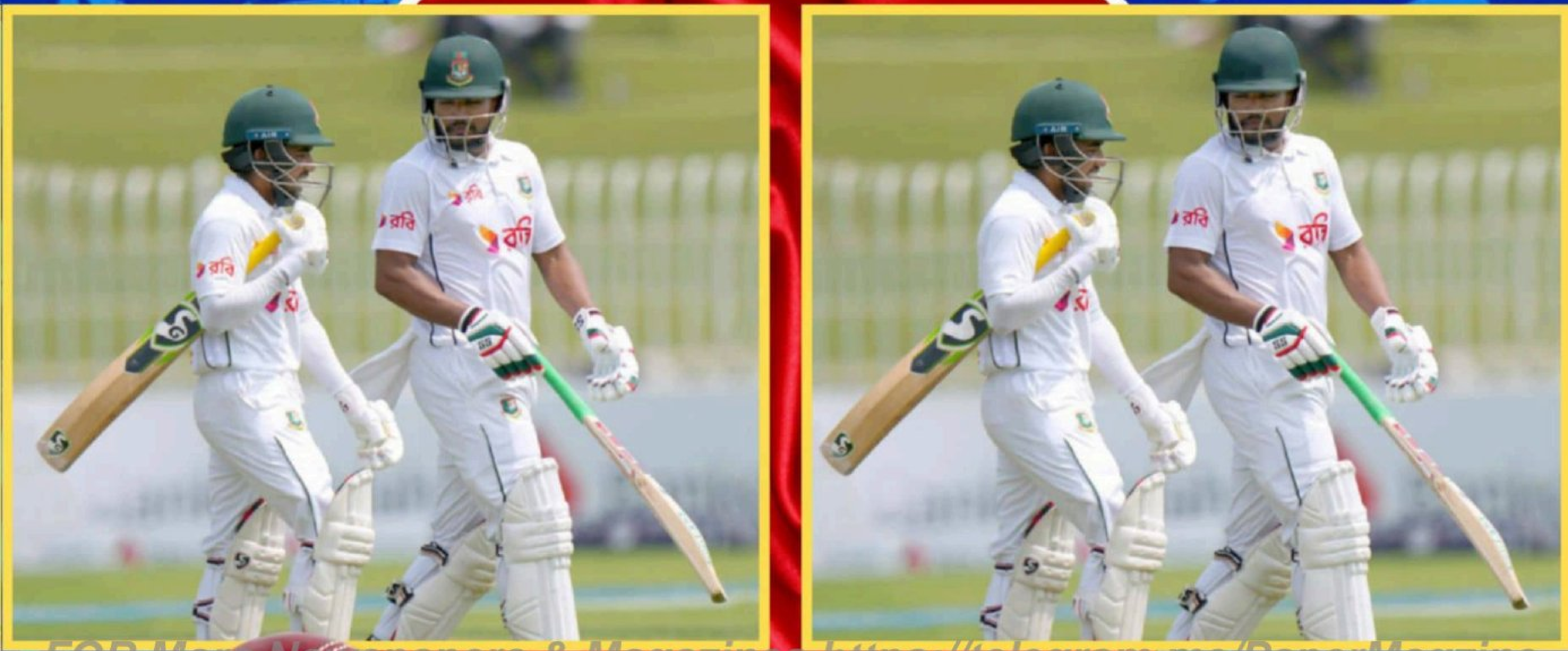
The sixth-ranked Pegula had a challenging road to the final. After defending her title at Toronto, the American played two matches on Friday because of weather-related postponements and had three matches go three sets. Her time on the court exceeded Sabalenka's by more than two hours entering the final.

"I'm proving to myself that I can play a lot of matches and overcome a lot of challenges,” Pegula said. “I'm looking forward to not doing anything for a few days."

Sabalenka joined top-ranked Iga Swiatek as the only players with 10 or more WTA titles since 2020. She beat Swiatek in the Cincinnati semis. ■

FIND SIX DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THESE TWO PICTURES

CONTEST



In this contest you have to spot six differences between both the pictures. Three lucky winners will get a Parker pen each.

RULES & REGULATIONS FOR THE CONTEST

- **Last date for entries:** October 25, 2024.
- A draw will determine the winner.
- Winners name will be announced in the next issue of cricket today.
- The prizes may vary from the one shown.
- Send in your answers along with your name, occupation, address, contact No. and Email ID at our postal address.

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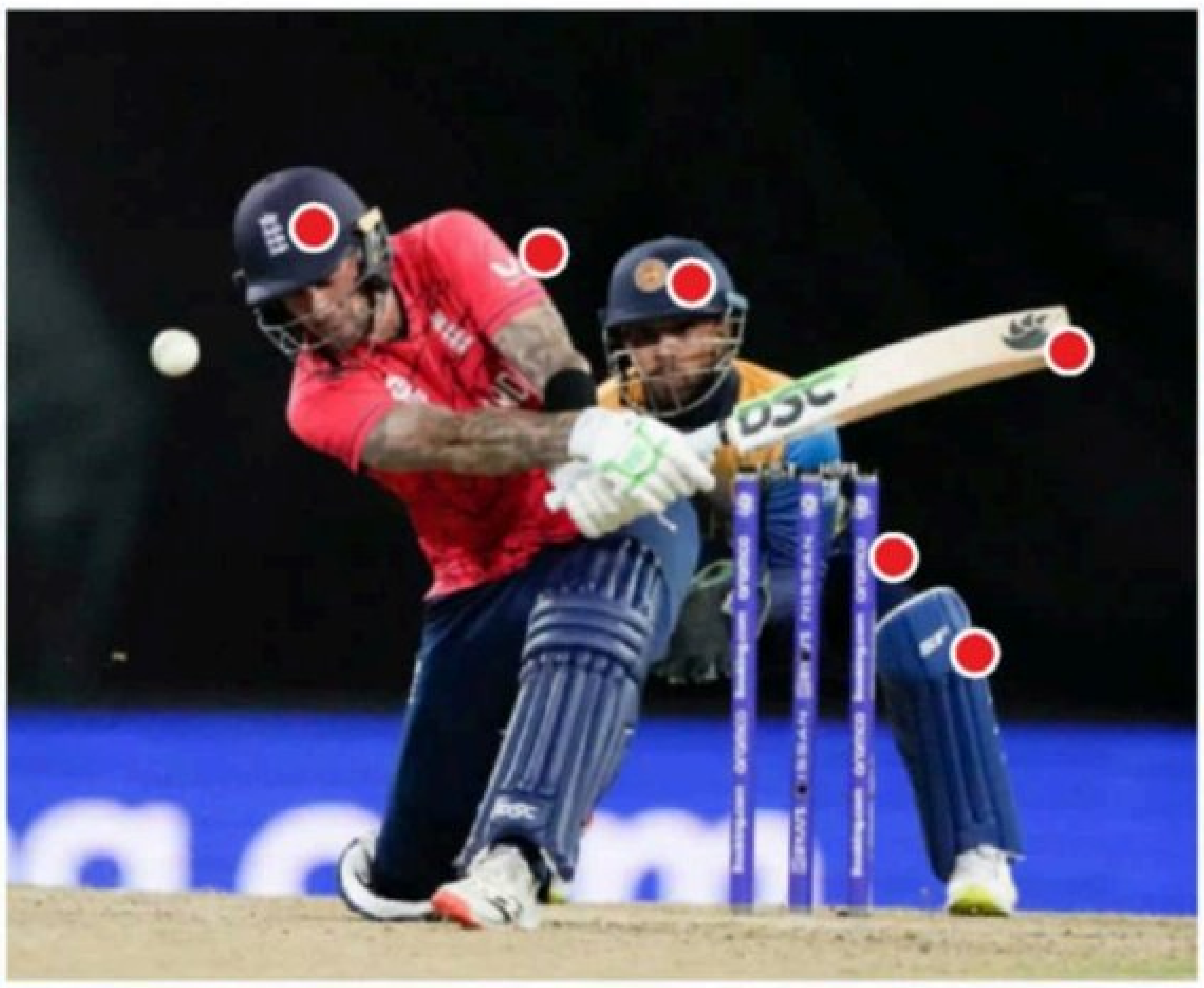

Last months's winners: Zeeshan (Delhi), Prince (Noida), Deepanshu (Gurugram)